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Weird Tales

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Weird Tales

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Published monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter September 24, 1938, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, $2.50; Canada, $2.75; elsewhere, $3.00. English Office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeants' Inn, Fleet Street, E.S.4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.
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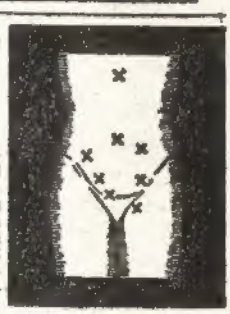

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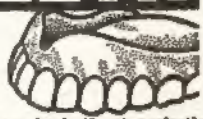

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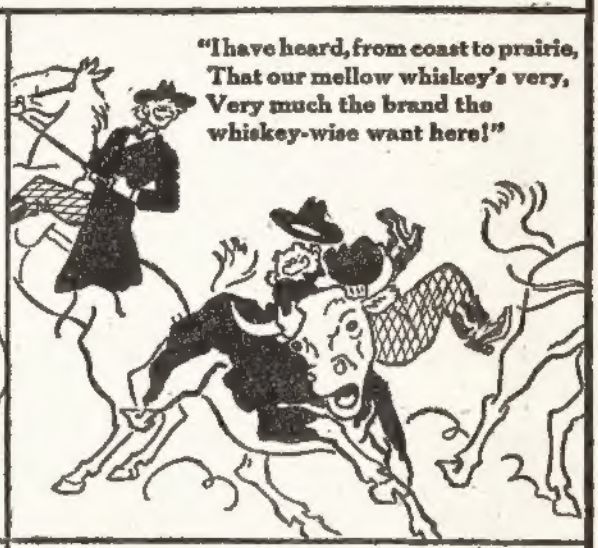

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More Lives Than One

By SEABURY QUINN

An unusual weird story that skips through the years and ends at last in America of the present day—a romantic and fascinating novelette

". . . he who lives more lives than one
More deaths than one must die."
—OSCAR WILDE, *Ballad of Reading Gaol.*

IT WAS a glowing day in late September, one of those days which are an afterthought of summer. The sun shone bright on Bree Straadt and on all the town of Zaandpoort. The tulip season was long passed, but in the burghers' gardens pruned rosebushes grew, and in the golden centers of their blossoms bees were humming busily. From a hundred gable chimneys rose the perfumed reek of peat fires,

straight as monuments in the clear, windless air. Peace and silence cinctured the small town like the circle of the bright blue vault of heaven, for although the Dutchman struggled with the Spaniard for possession of the country and the Netherlands lay under interdict from Dixmuide to Midwolde, there had been no signs of war here for a year and more, nor was it likely that there would be. The Zaandpoort burghers baked and glazed their tile and worked in brass and copper, casting bells and cooking-pots and sometimes, though not lately, cannon; their larders were well stocked, their trade was brisk, it mattered little if they paid tax to his Catholic Majesty of Spain or to the Staadts General, provided they were not asked to pay twice. Lately had come messengers from Leyden, asking that an aid of men and money be dispatched forthwith to help the Prince of Orange in his fight. A handsome purse was straightway raised and sent back with the townsmen's compliments, though no man stirred from shop or kiln or forge or foundry; for war was dangerous and inconvenient, and trade was mounting daily.

But no thought of war or politics or trade was in Lysbeth van de Doren's pretty head as she picked her way down Bree Straadt. Her thoughts were on more weighty matters, for yesterday, the feast of Michaelmas, her marriage banns had been affixed to the church door; at All Saints she and Adrian van Werff would stand before the altar and plight troth. A snatch of song came bubbling to her lips:

"De kabels los, de zeilen op,
Dat gaat er op een varen,
Al warren wij sinjeurs aan wal . . ."

Now she was almost at the stoep of Mynheer van Werff's house, she must be more dignified, as became the promised wife of Adrian van Werff, son of the city's leading lawyer and himself a student of the laws and statutes. The sun shone on her face and struck bright highlights from her chestnut-colored hair as she raised the polished knocker of the iron-studded door and struck the secret signal she and Adrian had devised: three light, sharp taps, a pause, and then two more. She was clad from throat to foot in cloak and doublet and full-plaited skirt of brown wool stuff; a broad, flat bonnet graced her head; above her bosom crossed a fichu of fine muslin, and the ribbon of the snood with which her hair was bound in token of her maidenhood was fastened in a dainty love-knot just behind her ear.

Pieter van Werff sat at his ease before the breakfast board. Life had been kind to him. Custodian of more secrets than the parish priest, adviser, counsellor and guide, if not exactly friend, to most of the rich burghers, he had been given guardianship of the fortune left by Dirk van de Doren to his daughter Lysbeth till such time as she came of age.

He had disbursed the gulden of his ward's estate with wisdom, though not always profit; and as the time for balancing accounts drew near, his sleep had been disturbed by very troublous dreams. But now the marriage banns were posted and at All Saints Lysbeth would be wed to Adrian, his son. An estate went to her lord and master with her hand, and Adrian was dutiful to the point of pliancy. There was no need to worry over accounts now. His smile of satisfaction swept his tablemates: Elsa, his wife, black-haired, brown-eyed, pale of face, a little raw-boned; Grootmoeder Anna, high-veined and parchment-skinned, her hair as white as fine-spun tow, her bent old body

fragile as a porcelain figurine; Adrian, his only child, with pale, smooth skin and startlingly black hair, a heritage from Elsa, large, limpid eyes and womanishly-small hands, more the poet and the dreamer than the hard-brained man of law . . . no matter, he had practicality and craft enough for both. Four they were, four members of a close-knit family. Soon they should be five, with addition of a heritage of seven thousand gulden concerning which no questions need be asked, or answered.

"Good morning, little child o' mine to be," he greeted Lysbeth as she came into the dining-hall with the brightness of the sun in eyes and hair and the tang of ocean air and peat smoke on her mantle. "Art up early the day. How fares it with thy Aunt Katrina, is her rheumatiz less of a burden? Wilt have a cup of fresh-brewed chocolate? . . ." Unconsciously, by purely reflex action, he rubbed one hand above another, as though he lathered them with unseen soap and laved them with invisible water.

Lysbeth looked away as she declined refreshment with a shy, half-frightened smile. She was in awe of Mynheer van Werff, and his habitual Pilate-like handwashing terrified her, why she could not say. Her troubled gaze found Adrian, and comfort. Adrian was sweet. Adrian was gentle as another maid, understanding, sympathetic, kind. At school when they were children he had taken blame for her misdoings more than once and had his hands—and buttocks—soundly beaten for no fault of his. Never had he raised his voice to her, never had they quarreled since their infancy, for certes, two must make a quarrel, and Adrian had never spoken to her save in kindness. What matter if he were not rough and robust, if he skated not so well, and refused to take part in the snowball battles or the races when winter glazed the canals with bright ice and the young men drove their two-horse sledges on the two-mile course from van de Venter's foundry to van Dieman's wharf? He was her own, her very own, her true and perfect lover, and time and time again he'd told her he would lay his life down for her. She believed him, too! She knew that he would suffer any hurt before he'd let harm come to her . . . her Adrian. Her blue eyes warmed and softened as they rested on him.

But her smile died like a sinking flame and she laid a hand against her breast as sudden tumult sounded in the street. Somewhere outside a woman screamed, a man's shout rose to die in a high, choking shriek, the bang of pistolets was punctuated by the pounding of shod hooves upon the paving-bricks, and the brazen bellow of a trumpet sounding "Rally!"

"Asturian dragoons . . . the Duke of Palma's men . . . dear Lord, sweet father of us all, have mercy! But we be peaceful subjects of King Philip, our young men make no war upon the Spanish, we pay our *impuestos* without murmur."

A LOUD and peremptory clatter of pike-butts against the panels sounded at the iron-strapped front door, and with a file of dragoons at his heels the Spanish commandant entered. "By sainted Catherine's tresses, here is more gallows-meat!" he swore as he surveyed the quintet in the dining-hall. "Put them in bonds, *mi sargento*——"

"Señor—Señor," implored Mynheer van Werff, "we are no rebels, I assure you, but good and faithful subjects of our rightful liege and king, Most Catholic Philip——"

"Ha? So?" broke in the Spaniard. "What may your name be, sirrah?"

"Van Werff, your excellency. I am a peaceful man of law, and loyal subject to the King, and these are of my family——"

The commandant waved his hand for silence while he unrolled a parchment scroll and scanned its contents rapidly. "No," he returned at last, "your name is not among the *proscribiros,* but I have small doubt that ye are secret rebels, none the less. Didst furnish aid and comfort, especially money, to the renegade of Orange?"

"I, your excellency? Before heaven, no! Neither I nor mine would give aid to a rebel 'gainst the crown——"

"H'm, that may be as that may be, we'll see to it anon. Meantime, where can one find the traitress Lysbeth van de Doren? Her name is on the list, but none can tell us of her whereabouts. Perhaps I should say none *will* tell us. Belike a little taste of rack and thumbscrew, gunpowder poured in a raw wound and lighted, or similar mild persuasive measures may loosen their tongues——"

"What business have you with the Jufvrow van de Doren, *Señor Capitán?*" asked Lysbeth.

"Why, only the slight business of her hanging, *Señorita,*" for the first time since he came into the house his somber, swarthy features softened as he looked at her. "Some little while ago came envoys from the Orange rebel asking funds to carry on his insurrection. Your townsmen sent him gold enough to pay for killing a brigade of loyal troops, more, by San Juan, than they ever sent his Catholic Majesty! But we are not to be imposed on, nor do our loyal spies sleep overmuch. The names of every man—and woman—who subscribed to this disloyal fund were sent to us forthwith, and the traitress van de Doren's name leads all the rest. Five hundred golden florins she dispatched to help this fox of Orange flee our Spanish sleuth-hounds——"

"I am Lysbeth van de Doren——"

"San Cristóbal! Thou——"

"But I know naught of any contribution to the Prince of Orange. I am an orphan in my nonage. I have not the spending of a maravedi from my fortune on my own say-so——"

"Ha, sayest thou? And who, then, ordereth the lavishing of thy gold——"

Before she realized, Lysbeth's eyes had turned upon her guardian, whose palsied hands were fumbling over one another as though they sought to wash an ineradicable stain away. She wrenched her glance away almost before it came to rest upon the cowering wretch, but the Spaniard was no fool.

"San Salvador!" he chuckled. "One sees the staff that bears the banner, now. A sly old Reynard, art thou not, *amigo mio?* One who scampers with the hare and courses with the hounds. The lily-whiteness of thy name is left unsmirched when we inquire of treason; should the rebels clamp down on thee, canst show the lavish contributions thou hast made from thy ward's moneys.

"Take him away, *sargento mio,*" he bade the grinning Asturian, "we'll hang him on the highest gibbet on the square—or stay, perhaps impalement would be better. Let him die slowly in the sight of all his fellow townsmen that they may see the fate that awaits traitors and be made afraid."

"Mercy, *excelencia,* mercy!" croaked Mynheer van Werff. "I pray——"

"Hadst best be making prayers to heaven, old man," the Spaniard cut in derisively. "Only heaven can avail thee now, and the greatest blessing thou canst ask is that thy body will not hold

thy soul too long when my sweet lambs begin to work on it."

"*Señor Capitán,* I prithee have compassion on him!" Lysbeth started forward, almost laid her hand upon the Spaniard's arm. "What little aid he gave the rebels was forced from him, doubtless by their threats, and he gave them somewhat of my heritage that he might hold the rest intact for me. Oh, hear me, *caballero*"—her little hands were clasped before her as in prayer, her blue eyes swam with tears, her voice was heavy with the burden of petition—"hear my plea as one day you may hope the blessed saints in heaven will hear yours! I know no more than you how great or small my fortune is, but with my guardian's permission I will give it all to you to prosecute the war against the rebels. Surely, that will more than make amends for the little which was given in my name, and doubtless given under fear of threats from the *rebeldes.*"

Señor Don Esteban José Diego Gonzales de Quesada y Lopez, lieutenant-captain in the armies of his Catholic Majesty of Spain, looked at the pleading girl and tweaked the black mustachios that grew like little horns upon his upper lip. He was a handsome man, albeit his features had a somber, almost morose cast in repose. Now he gave a smile that flashed white teeth and full, red lips, and stroked his small mustache again. "Thy fortune—all of it, *muy señorita mia?*" he asked slowly, almost musingly.

"Aye, *caballero*——"

Something in the gleam of his long-lashed black eyes arrested her. From her snood-bound chestnut hair to the square-cut tips of her small shoes his gaze traveled as though he totted up a line of figures and was not quite certain of their sum. Then irresolution vanished and a satyr unrestrained and shameless looked out of Don Esteban's black eyes. "Why, certes," he replied. "I'll take thy fortune i' the King's name gladly—if the heiress gives herself to me with it."

"But, *Señor Capitán,* I am affianced to the young Heer van Werff——"

"Who doubtless also is a heretic and *renegado*——"

"Not so, *mi capitán.* I swear he is a son of the true faith——"

The smile went from the Spaniard's face and left it bleak as sunset on a moor in winter. "Here is my offer, *Señorita,*" he announced. "Take it or reject it, but be quick. I shall not proffer it again:

"Those men and women we have taken into custody must hang, and hanging is a merciful concession when you stop to think that they are traitors taken *flagrante delicto.* Less than half of those whose names appear hereon"—he tapped the parchment in his hand—"are taken. Accept my offer and I burn this treason-roll forthwith. The King's justice will be appeased by these few executions; as to the rest—we Spaniards have a saying that he must have sharp eyes who can look through a golden hoodwink. Come, what sayest thou? Thy purse and person as a ransom for the lives of half a thousand of thy neighbors, not to add"—his mocking glance swept over Mynheer van Werff and his family—"the lives of those whom doubtless you hold dear?"

A CHOKING sound, half cough, half lingual spasm, came from Mynheer van Werff. "On behalf of my ward I accept your offer, *Señor Capitán,*" he murmured in a throaty, trembling whisper, eager to conclude the bargain as a roving chapman is to close a sale.

"Speak when thou'rt spoken to, old man," the Spaniard reproved. "What say'st thou, *Señorita?*"

"And—and if I say thee yea?"

"Then by the bones of all the sainted martyrs I will keep my contract to the letter. But if thou sayest nay—*Sargento!*"

"Si, Señor Capitán!"

"Make ready cords to bind me these vile rebels for the executioner——"

"No, no, your excellency! She cannot hold herself so dear. One life for five hundred, the guerdon of her honor in the balance 'gainst our death by torment——" Now they were round her like a pack of beggars round the dispenser of largess, imploring, weeping, pleading. Upon their knees they made a ring about her, and held up piteous hands or bent and kissed her garment's hem, the margin of her cloak, the very silver buckles of her shoon. They quoted Scripture to her: It is better that the limb should perish than the whole body. . . . Greater love hath no man than that he should lay down his life for his friends. . . .

Grootmoeder Anna knelt before her, her head thrown back, the faded eyes set in the pastel pallor of her wrinkled face awash with tears of supplication. "Myself am old and have but small time left, dear child," she mumbled. " 'Tis not for me, but for them that I plead. My son, my grandchild, all my family must perish miserably if you refuse. Think of your neighbors—your old playmates and your father's friends. They must surely hang unless you do relent. . . ."

Adrian, her promised husband, held her hand in both of his and laid his cheek against it. "Thou'lt do this—make this sacrifice for us, sweetest Lysbeth?" he entreated. "Oh, Lysbeth, save us, I implore thee."

A dreadful surge of weakness, as if everything inside her had been turned to water, swept through Lysbeth. "And thou, my Adrian, canst *thou* ask this of me?" Wide and serious, a little puzzled, wholly disbelieving, her blue eyes rested on his tear-filled dark ones.

"Not for myself, dear love—oh, never think it!" he gasped. "Gladly would I die the death a thousand times for thee—thou know'st it well—but for my sire and mother, and the aged grandame." Sobs choked his voice, and as his wont was when he cajoled her with love's endearments, he spread her fingers out against his hand, kissed each rosy tip, then pressed a kiss against her palm and folded her five fingers tightly over it. "Please, Lysbeth dear, my sweet, my only love, say thou wilt do this thing for us!"

"And if I do it, if I give myself that ye may live, ye'll not think hardly of me? Oh, Adrian, my love, my life, my very dearest dear, to promise in advance is easy, but to forget the price thou askest me to pay will be so difficult! I may give my body to the Spaniard, for he has bought me as his slave, but always and for ever, dear, my heart is thine. Thou'lt not forget, nor hate, nor yet despise me? When in the goodness of the Lord his time this cruel war is ended, should I come back to thee—" A retching, deep sob split her words, but Adrian answered the half-completed question:

"I shall be waiting for thee, precious love, though years have passed and I be but a dotard. In all the earth and sky there is none other for me but thyself, my Lysbeth. 'Tis not dishonor, but to honor like that of the blessed saints thou goest. Did not the good Saint Paul endure the hangman's whip and suffer forty stripes save one? And were they not a badge of honor rather

than disgrace, because of Him for whose sake he suffered them? Indeed!

"Thou dost not lay they virtue by in doing this, sweet Lysbeth. Thou dost but lend it for a little time—pledge it as a gage and hostage for the lives and safety of thy friends and loved ones. Oh, thou art purer than the wind that sweeps the ocean, chaster than the moon at full; thou art thy people's savior and their very patron saint!"

She had no words to speak her self-renunciation. But her silent nod of acquiescence told the Spaniard he had won, and he held to his bargain. Stepping to the fireplace where a cone of peat was smoldering beneath the steaming kettle, he thrust the roll of doom into the flames and watched it as it turned from brown to black and finally crackled into gray, curled ash.

"And now for the accounting, good Mynheer Iscariot," he bade van Werff. " 'Twere well for thee if thou hast gold enow to make the payment cash in hand, and mark ye, not a groat less than the whole will I accept.

"And what may be the lady's fortune?" he demanded as they closed the door of Mynheer van Werff's counting-room.

"Three thousand gulden, excellency." The lawyer's hands were fumbling over one another till it seemed they surely must be flayed.

"No more than that? By Santa Catalina, I had thought it would be twice as much!"

"We be honest, but poor folk, your excellency. Our wealth, such as it is, is heaped together groat by copper groat. The Jufvrouw van de Doren is a very wealthy woman for these parts." He eyed the Spaniard under lowered lids, but Don Esteban was thinking more of Lysbeth than her money, and made no reply.

Mynheer van Werff was much put to it to maintain an air of seemly gravity as he told out the broad gold pieces. It was not every day one met four thousand gulden rolling up the hill to greet one.

While this was toward in Mynheer van Werff's office the family showered blessings upon Lysbeth's head. They smothered her with kisses, buried her beneath a flood of fulsome praise, declared she was a saint and holy martyr. Then, one by one, as if they left the corpse-bed of a dear departed one, they went out. Last of all went Adrian, leaving her a kiss upon the hand—did she notice that he did not kiss her yearning lips?—with a final promise: "Fare thee well, my noble love, until we meet again, for sometime, somewhere, meet again we shall."

Then in agony of heartbreak past endurance Lysbeth cast herself full-length upon the floor, and in utter misery and bitterness of spirit beat her brow upon the polished boards.

THE wind that blew across the dykes and dunes and ice-bound canals was as bitter as a curse, the ground was cold and hard as death's own self, the snow fell fast and faster. But Lysbeth van de Doren bent her hooded head against the tempest and drew her fur-lined cloak more tightly round her as she stepped onward through the storm, the song within her heart up-welling till it overflowed her lips:

> "From the dungeon of night
> The moon hath respite,
> But shadows her fleeing path mark;
> For, love, thou art late,
> And lonely I wait,
> Alone in the dark . . . in the dark."

"But not much longer, heart o' mine," she whispered. "Ah, sweetest of my heart, it's been so long, so very

long! I know now how the little birds must feel when they cross the sea in springtime to come nesting in their old home once again. The last few miles are weariest, soothly."

For five eternal years she had been "Doña Isabella" to the officers and gentlemen of the Spanish camps and garrisons, always the object of that grave courtesy with which the Spaniard treated women, often finding friendships unexpectedly among her country's enemies. His fellow officers had no hesitancy in accepting Esteban's *"mujer"* at her face value, for a soldier's woman was his own affair, whether she was married to him with bell, book and candle, or joined to him by *vis armata.*

Now her period of servitude was done. The English and the French had joined to help the Netherlanders, and prideful Philip had made truce with his rebellious subjects ere they drove his legions at pike-point into the sea. Don Esteban had been regretful at their parting. So used to her had he become that he even offered marriage if she would stay with him, but: "Nay, *Estebanito mio,"* she refused. "I gave my fortune and lent myself in ransom for my people, and you performed your contract honorably. But while I brought my body with me, I left my heart behind. Now I go to seek it. *Adios, amigo caro."*

"Muy bien, as you will, *mi Isabelita,"* he returned. "How one can love a cow-eyed Dutchman after knowing Esteban's affection is more than I can comprehend, but *un mono es hermoso á otro mono*—even a monkey is beautiful to another of his species—as the proverb has it. *Va con Dios*—go with God—my little pigeon, and may you find such happiness throughout your life as you have given me these last five years." Then he pressed a heavy purse—two hundred of her own gulden—in her hand, and to the skirl of fifes and growl of drums marched off with his command.

Now she retraced the paths of childhood. Yonder was the Vrouw van Bokkelen's house where she and Adrian had gone to school, and he had literally suffered more than once for her sins. Lovingly she fingered the small jewel she had bought for him in Antwerp, a golden wire tied in a love-knot and set with diamonds and small pearls. It had cost her all her hoard beyond her passage money, but what booted it? How fine it would look on his doublet! She would pin it there with her own hands and tell him: " 'Tis the symbol of our love unbreakable, my dear. All through the years I trod the valley of despond with bleeding feet it was the promise of your waiting that sustained me. We be bound by ties unloosable, we twain."

Like a nun who strengthens tempted faith by repetition of her credo, she repeated for the hundred thousandth time his parting words: "I shall be waiting for thee, precious love, though years have passed and I be but a dotard. In all the earth and sky there is none other for me but thyself, sweet Lysbeth."

Ah, but he was no dotard, nor was she aged, either! They both were young, the years stretched out before them, years of love and trust and comfort, unmarred by war's alarums. The journey had been long, the faring cruelly hard, but she was home at last.

In every window candles shone, on every stoep there stood a row of wooden shoes, for it was Christmas Eve, and good Saint Nicholas, whom some called Santa Klaus, would be upon his rounds anon to leave mementoes of the blessed Lord his birthday in the empty shoon.

Now she stood before the door of

the van Werff homestead, and as she paused she saw three pairs of shoes upon the stoep. One a man's, that would be Adrian's; then a somewhat smaller pair, his mother's, doubtless. But none to represent Mynheer van Werff or Grandame Anna? For five years she had had no word of them; perhaps they had been called to heavenly rest . . . but what were these? A small and dainty pair of shoon, all bright with fresh new gilding. Too large to represent a child, yet . . . some neighbor maid's, perhaps, mayhap a relative who came to live with them. The Low Countries were filled with orphans these days.

Timidly she took the knocker in her hands and beat upon the panels with the secret knock which she and Adrian had used to make their comings known to one another since their childhood. Three light, sharp taps, a pause, and then two more. As she raised and dropped the knob of polished brass her heart beat faster, like an echo of its knocks.

No answer came to her first summons, nor her second. But at the third a step scuffed on the boards beyond the door. Then the portal was thrown open, and Adrian stood limned in the opening, with the firelight and the candlelight upon him. Within the circle of his arm stood a young woman, fair-haired, pink-cheeked, fragile as a child.

Now she was face to face with him, her thousand-times rehearsed speech fainted on her lips. She could but stretch her empty hands out to him for the heart she'd left in his keeping, and: "Adrian, beloved, it is I. I have come home," she faltered.

The fair-haired woman's gaze was sharply questioning upon him. "What means this, husband?" she demanded.

His eyes dropped to the snowy doorstep. He would not look at either of them; then: "'Tis some woman of the town or camps come to make sport with us," he answered. "I know her not. 'Fore heaven, I never saw the wench until this moment, wife.

"Be off, thou wicked wanton," he bade Lysbeth, and as he slammed the door upon her, drew a silver thaler from his purse and cast it directly at her feet.

At the corner of the street a lantern gleamed, and in the darkness shone upon steel caps and cuirasses and pike-heads. With ordered tread the watch came marching, and their captain flashed his light into her face. "Why, by Saint Nicholas, 'tis Lysbeth van de Doren!" he announced. "Lysbeth the traitress, who deserted friends and promised husband for a Spanish lover! Be off, thou barracks-drab, for if the daylight find thee here, thou'lt feel the hangman's whip upon thy pretty back. We want none such as thee in our good town!"

They found her frozen in the snow on Christmas morning. Clasped in her hand was a small jewel, a love-knot fashioned out of gold and pearls and diamonds, doubtless a token of inordinate affection from her Spanish paramour.

Since she had no kin nor any who would undertake her funeral costs, they sold the sinful gewgaw to buy grave space in the churchyard, and it was Adrian van Werff who bought it. By odd coincidence the price he gave just paid for her sepulcher, and there was nothing left to pay for so much as a single low mass for her soul's repose.

That evening Adrian showed the bauble to his wife, who laughed and said it was a pretty thing and pinned it on his doublet next his heart.

ADRIAN VAN WERFF lay dead in the great carven bedstead where nine and forty years before he had been born. He knew that he was dead, for there his body lay with its head upon the goose-down pillow, the eyes half closed, the mouth half open, the tongue thrust forth a little, as though he made an idiot-face at life. Beside the bed his newly widowed wife was kneeling with her hands pressed palm to palm, as became a devout daughter of the church, but no tears trickled from her eyes, nor did her shoulders shake with sobbing. Presently the sick-nurse tiptoed to the bed and bound his hands together with a length of linen, bandaged up his sagging jaw and laid gulden on his half-closed, staring eyes. "Nay, *Tante,*" bade the Murvrouw van Werff, "he needs not gold to weigh his eyelids down. Copper will do quite as well." She rose and bustled from the room, the house-keys jangling at her girdle.

Adrian went with her. It was remarkable how light he felt, how easily he moved. He was dead, no doubt of that, and yet he felt no difference. He could move and think and talk and feel, or could he? He stamped his foot against the stair, and no sound resulted. "Wife," he began, "be thou of cheer, for I still see thee——" He ceased, for though he knew he spoke, no sound came from his lips. It was as if he thought the words. "I will be heard!" he shouted. The deep silence was undisturbed.

Now they had passed the turn of the broad stair and came into the central hall. Above the overmantel of the fireplace was a great mirror, and the woman paused before it to arrange her hair. Adrian stood beside her, but only her face looked back from the glass. He laid his hand upon her shoulder, but she paid no heed, and when he put his fingers on her curling golden hair the strands were not disturbed.

Of late years, since his hair had gone to join his youth, it was his wont when puzzled to run his hand across his thin-thatched poll. He did so now, or, rather, tried to do so. But when his hand and head met, or whether there were hand and head to meet, he could not say, for there was no feeling of resistance nor any image in the mirror to record his actions. "Better hell than this!" he screamed and fell upon his knees to crawl into the fireplace where a bed of peat was smoldering. Elbow-deep he thrust his unseen arms into the glowing mass, but as far as any answering sensation told him, he might as well have put them into water.

Then Adrian van Werff went mad. Stark, staring crazy, he rushed and bounced and bounded round the hall, banging into chairs and chests and settees, meeting no resistance from their solidness, since he flowed around and over them as though he had been air, feeling no sensation of discomfort as he struck them. Oh, for pain, for the feel of hurt, for bruise or cut or wound, for anything to tell him he had sentient form or substance, however tenuous!

His wife was entering the office where for three-score years and more he and his sire had done the legal business of the city. She was sitting at the ancient desk of Flemish oak where he had sat to notarize a thousand documents; she had taken up a goose-quill from the copper tray and was mending it with a penknife. Now she dipped it in the ink-horn and began to write upon a sheet of foolscap:

My very darling:

It is finished and the old man sleeps the sleep that knows no waking. How long he delayed going, how frenziedly he clutched at life, as if it still held something for him—he who forswore love and broke his pledged word to the maid who

saved him and his family from the stake that he might do his father's will and wed me and my fortune!

But all of that is done with now, my sweeting. His lips are stilled, his eyes are blind, his hands are holden in the grave. Tomorrow we consign him to the churchyard clay, and after that come quickly to me, dear, for the time we still may spend together grows shorter day by day, and I can scarce contain me till I make you master of the fortune he amassed. Oh, come, my love, do not delay; there's many a cup of wine in Adrian's tuns for us to quaff, many a bright gold piece in his treasury for our spending.

Yrs. ever fondly,

MARTHA.

She folded the epistle, sealed it with red wax and superscribed it with the name of Doctor Latimus Brandt, the young German imperic who with degrees from Milan and Cologne had lately come to Zaandpoort to dispense physic and take the women's hearts with the snare of his blond beard.

And now, although he was incapable of body-pains, Adrian van Werff felt pangs of hell. Like shadows in a lantern-show the memory-pictures reeled before him. The covert word, the secret, meaning glance, the smile that spoke a volume in its subtleness—he had seen them all when he and Martha went to church and the learned Doctor bowed before them in his ceremonial robes of black, but never till this moment had they had a meaning for him. Poor, purblind fool!

He raved and screamed and stormed at her. The only sound within the room was that the copper kettle made as it steamed on the hearth. He beat her with his insubstantial hands, and not a curling, fine-spun hair of her blond head was lifted from its wonted place. He sought to snatch the document that testified his shame up from the desk, but though he struggled till he felt as though his heart would burst with effort, he could not budge the lightly folded paper.

Hark! From the Groot Kerke steeple came a peal, deep, resonant, final as the knell of doom. One—two—three; one—two—three; one—two—three! "Nine tollers mark a man"—it was the passing bell.

Martha sank down to her knees and joined her hands what time she mumbled almost soundlessly. Now she finished, " . . . *mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.*" She signed herself and rose, then rang a bell.

"Take this to Doctor Latimus Brandt," she told the servant who responded. "Quickly, sirrah, and inform him you await his answer."

"No, no; I forbid it!" Adrian shouted.

Stillness, more clamorous than brazen gongs, lay on the room where Martha, comely, thirty-four years old, rich and a widow, sat and smiled as she awaited a reply from her lover.

Adrian raised his phantom voice and screamed a silent scream. Had he possessed a heart to break it surely must have shattered. Forsaken, impotent, unwept-for and unmourned, he was nothing. Less than nothing. . . .

How he came there he had no idea, but he was on a vast and empty plain, a place of utter desolation. Beneath him was a floor of sand; dull brown and lusterless, it stretched away into infinity on every side, level, changeless, monotonous as a waveless sea. Around him swirled—or rather lay, for it was motionless—a thick, dark mist, not gray, not brown, but a blending of both shades. The atmosphere was thick and heavy, but not dark. Rather, it was something like the fog-bound twilight of a winter's day, not light enough to see in clearly, not dark enough to shut out sight. He could not say if it were

wet or cold or dry or hot; he only knew he stood in a place which had been the same since eons before time began, and which would be the same always . . . always, through time and all eternity. The changelessness of it appalled him. He was afraid, desperately afraid, yet what he feared he did not know. He tried to pray, but nowhere could he find words. Something, perhaps the very vastness and the desolation that surrounded him, seemed mocking him. He threw himself face-downward on the sand and sought to hide himself . . . hide from what? There was nothing here to hide from. That was it—nothing! It was the nothingness, the great and awful nothingness, that terrified him.

But now the mist seemed lightening. Slowly, very slowly—whether it took minutes, years or centuries he could not say — the fog was changing from a tawny to a steel gray, then lightening to a clear, bright rose. He watched the slow transition breathlessly. Now it seemed the mist before him, far and far away, was thinning gradually, thinning till it was as clear as air, and through it he descried a city.

Yet it was no city such as he had ever seen or dreamed of. It seemed walled round about with jasper, and its towers, reaching to the very vault of heaven, seemed made of diamond, emerald and ruby. No sun or moon or stars shone on it, but from its very heart there seemed to emanate a light the like of which he'd never seen, a light that combined all the glory of the midday sun, the beauty of the full moon and the twinkling radiance of stars at once. From the wondrous city, more guessed at than perceived, there seemed to come a strain of music more majestic than the organs of the great cathedrals when they thunder forth the Resurrection pæans at Easter and the mighty choirs take the joyous anthem up.

And then it seemed a voice which shook the earth like thunder, yet which was so soft and infinitely tender that it struck upon his inward ear like the still call of conscience, came to him: "O man, O little selfish man who forswore love and repaid faith and trust with faithlessness and perfidy, what shall be thy portion?"

For a breathless second Adrian considered a defense, thought how his father had insisted that he forget Lysbeth and take the heiress Martha van Grool to wife, thought how he might declare he believed Lysbeth had deserted him and cast her lot in with the Spaniard, but only for a fleeting second did he hold these thoughts. The remembrance of her stricken eyes when he implored her to save him from the Spaniards' torture, the recollection of the look she gave him when he turned her from his door and threw the Judas-silver to her, beat down his spurious defense and left him cowering and without answer to the charge.

"Speak Thou my sentence, Lord," he whispered. "I am not worthy to be burnt in hell, for in denying her who gave her all for me and mine I did deny the faith by which I had a right to hope for mercy on my sins."

A moment or a century—he could not say which—elapsed before he heard the mighty voice again: "Go thou back to earth again, weak, sinful man, and tread the valley of adversity till thou hast made as great a sacrifice as thy wronged love once made for thee. Till then thou art shut out from joy or bliss or any rest beyond the grave."

It was pleasant in Cranberry Street. Although the city sweltered in a heat wave that stuffed nostrils and stopped

throats, a cool breeze blew up from the Lower Bay and over Brooklyn Heights. It was good to be there, resting in the shadowed coolness of the old home, free from changing guard and setting pickets, free from orders and discipline and the hundred details of a soldier's life, Captain Brant van Werff thought as he dropped a second chipping from the sugar-loaf into his breakfast coffee and smiled across the table at his young wife.

"It's odd, my dear," he told her as he stirred the sweetening in his cup, "how often they seemed forewarned of our coming. You remember how I wrote you that we'd take them by surprise at Caton's Wells? They were waiting for us with artillery in position and half a regiment of cavalry in reserve. If Custer hadn't come up when he did we should have been wiped out. We were pretty badly cut up, as it was."

Marianna van Werff patted back an embryonic yawn. "Really, Brant, must we discuss the war?" she asked. Daughter of a family of wealthy Williamsburgers, cotton factors and strong Southern sympathizers, she had opposed her husband's going when the call for volunteers came, but she had been a conscientious, even avid correspondent, every letter begging him for information of his next move.

"You seemed interested enough when I was at the front," he countered.

"Oh—then. Why, it's a wife's duty to be interested in what her husband does and where he goes, and so, of course, I wanted to know everything about you. But you're not there fighting Mr. Lincoln's war now, dear. You are home with me again, and we've so many other things to talk about."

"Why, so we have," he agreed with another smile. "How's Harry? Joined the army yet?"

"Of course not. Father needs him at the office. Poor Papa's been so worried, with the blockade making business so difficult——"

A hot retort sprang to Brant's lips, but he smothered it unuttered and passed his angry look off as resulting from a twinge of pain from his hurt shoulder.

"Poor dear," she sympathized. "Does it hurt terribly? Why don't you ask for a discharge? You've given Mr. Lincoln quite enough of you already; you've a wife and children to consider —don't you love us, Brant?"

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honor more,"

he quoted. "Come, don't let's quarrel, honey, I've only three weeks' leave, and——"

" 'Scuse me, Cap'n van Werff, suh," Delia, the colored maid, bustled into the dining-room, her eyes agleam with self-importance, "but dere's a gen'leman down at de do' ter see yuh. A sojer gen'leman, suh. He says hit's mos' impo'tant."

At her master's nod she turned and ushered in a young man in zouave uniform who saluted as he entered and drew a folded envelope from his cummerbund.

"By George!" Brant gulped the last remaining coffee from his cup and rose, "I'm called for duty in New York, dear."

"In *New York?* Why——"

"There's a riot there. The criminal element has risen in protest against the draft; the police can't handle 'em, and troops are being called.

"Has the insurrection gone far, Corporal?" he turned to the young soldier.

"Aye, sir. They've burnt th' Provost Marshal's office in Third Avenue, took th' Twenty-first Street Armory an'

kilt or injured half th' po-lice force. Nightsticks an' revolvers ain't no use agin 'em, sir. It needs cold steel."

"All right, Corporal, I'll be with you right away." Captain van Werff took his cap and blouse from the hall rack, but hesitated as he reached up for his sword-belt. "Won't you gird it on me —this time, Marianna, please?" he asked her almost diffidently.

A mask-like immobility spread across her face, her blue eyes hardened till they seemed like little frozen pools. "Never! What can I tell my children if I do? You've been making war against Americans, men and women fighting for their sacred liberties; now you go to cut down peaceful citizens whose only crime is their objection to King Lincoln's odious draft law. Oh, to think my husband and my children's father should——"

He bent and kissed her quickly; then, his saber clanking as he snapped the buckle of his belt, ran down the steps and turned north toward the Fulton Ferry.

"I could not love thee, dear, so much . . ." he muttered half aloud as they strode down the steep decline of Hicks Street.

"What's that, sir?" Corporal Casey asked.

"Oh, nothing. How'd the riot make such headway?"

"They didn't know how bad it wuz until about ten thousand come a-marchin' down Broadway, shoutin' 'No draft' and 'Hang Greeley!' sir. They took it out in yellin' when they seen th' po-lice by th' Provost Marshal's office there, but over in Third Avenue they broke into the Provost's an' burnt th' buildin' down. They beat th' po-lice senseless, an' when fifty o' th' Invalid Corps marched out agin 'em they stoned an' clubbed 'em till they broke an' run. They tell me they kilt twenty of 'em. Now they've took th' Armory an' th' Union Steam Works. . . ."

NEW YORK was in a state of siege. The July sky curved merciless and baking as a red-hot copper bowl above the stricken city; here and there great clouds of smoke and orange flame belched up; Negroes' bodies swung from trees and lamp-posts; stores and homes were looted. Along First Avenue from Fourteenth to Eleventh Street the roadway had been barricaded with telegraph- and lamp-poles, with barrels, boxes, carts and furniture from pillaged stores and houses piled between. Earlier in the day the mob had fought off soldiers and police and murdered Colonel O'Brien of the Eleventh Volunteers. Now the rabble crouched behind their breastworks and hurled defiance at the detail of zouaves Captain van Werff led against them. Raised like an ensign was a board on which was crudely lettered "No Draft," and as the line of red-and-blue clad troops advanced the mob's war song rose deafeningly:

"We'll hang old Greeley to a sour-apple tree,
We'll hang old Greeley to a sour-apple tree,
We'll hang old Greeley to a sour-apple tree,
And send him straight to hell!"

A brick came hurtling from a housetop and a soldier in the front rank fell, his musket clattering against the cobblestones. "Halt! Right face; forward, march! Rear rank, about face; forward, march!" Captain van Werff shouted; then as the marching men reached east and west curbs of the street: "Halt! 'Bout face—right file, shoot every man you see in every building opposite you; left file, shoot to kill if anyone dares show himself in buildings across the street!"

There was a moment's pregnant si-

lence; then, furtive as an alley cat, a man crept to a roof-coping and leaned across it, gun in hand. *Crack!* a zouave's rifle barked and the mobster toppled to the sidewalk. Several more attempts to snipe were similarly dealt with; then van Werff brought his men in company front and marched them toward the barricade.

The troops the mob had fought thus far were raw recruits or sick and wounded members of the Invalid Corps. Outnumbering the soldiers by a hundred to one, they had showered them with stones and bricks and bullets and clubbed them in close conflict, then retreated when the fighting grew too hot. Now they were massed behind breast-high defenses, armed with gun and ax and pistol, and were three hundred to each soldier.

But the men who came against them now were neither raw recruits nor invalids. Veterans of Antietam, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, slaughter was no novelty to them. They had faced — and twice defeated — soldiers of the finest army in the world led by officers the peers of any. Shots and stones and jeering execrations of a mob could not intimidate a corps to whom the Rebel Yell could not strike terror. "Fire!" cried Captain van Werff, and ere the echo of the volley died away: "Charge bayonets!"

Like a breaking, smashing tidal wave of blue and red the zouaves boiled across the barricade, their long sword-bayonets stabbing, cutting, flailing, spreading blood and terror through the close-packed street. The rabble's banner went down, its bearer slashed to shreds by knife-edged bayonets. Howls and cries and screams for mercy sounded everywhere. Artillery is deadly, and so is cavalry, and the Gatling gun and musket take their toll. But the bayonet is a bonny tool to work with! In twenty minutes they were through the barricades, in half an hour they were in an empty street, save for the corpses and the moaning wounded strewn upon the cobbles.

Outstanding in the mob had been two leaders, a one-armed giant with an iron-studded club and a young man dressed in dirty overalls. These had singled out van Werff at the first impact of the charge. The one-armed man flailed a tremendous blow at his head, but as the bludgeon fell the Captain drove his saber through the giant's throat, and sank upon one knee to dodge the club whose blow his death-stroke could not halt. Just as he knelt the overalled young man brushed past him, thrust his pistol almost in his face and fired. A bayoneted mobster fell against him as he pulled the trigger, and the bullet crashed through van Werff's wounded shoulder, stunning him.

But as the desperado fired the Captain recognized him. Harry—Harry Briggs, his brother-in-law. A murderous Copperhead! Northern born and Northern bred, he had no call to espouse the South's cause, or, if he felt that the Confederates were right, he might have joined them and fought honorably in their army. But he was here, dressed as a laboring man, inciting criminals of the lowest grade to rob and burn and murder, stirring up rebellion among gangsters of his native city, striking at his war-torn country from behind.

Did Marianna know of this? . . .

The pallor of the pre-dawn died and in the east above Jamaica and Flushing a faint rose crept into the sky, as color returns to the cheeks of one reviving from a faint. Captain van Werff stumbled twice upon the flagstone walk

as he toiled uphill from the Fulton Ferry; at the corner by his house he would have fallen had he not seized a lamp-post in the curve of his left arm. His right hung helpless in a sling; fatigue was now so deep it had become impersonal; his eyes were gritty with lost sleep. Pain from his freshly wounded shoulder throbbed and burned through every inch of him. Three times he strove to mount the brownstone steps of his front porch before he was successful.

Down the stairwell splashed a feeble fall of gaslight from his wife's boudoir. He sighed—the dear girl waited up for him.

Slowly, with halting, infirm steps, he climbed the winding stair, leaned against the wall to gather strength and tottered down the hall toward Marianna. Voices sounded in the dimly lighted powder room, hers and a man's.

Brant drew a deep breath, laid his hand against the wall for leverage and lurched into the room.

Shadows advanced and receded in quick-changing patterns as the gaslight flickered in the light breeze blowing from the River. Marianna sat upon a hassock, elbows on her knees, chin in palms. Her wine-red dressing-gown splashed out around her on the gray-green China matting like an ever-widening pool of fresh-spilt blood. On the rattan settee by the window lounged a man, a dandified coxcomb in purple swallowtail, fawn-colored pantaloons and flowered linen waistcoat. Harry Briggs, his wife's brother—the Copperhead!

With cold steadiness van Werff's eyes rested on the visitor as he fumbled at his holster with his left hand: "Don't move, Briggs. I arrest you on a charge of treason!"

But Briggs did move. Lithe as a cat he leaped up from the settee, and as he rose his eyes were pitiless.

"Quick, Hal," thus Marianna, "before he calls for help!"

The gaslight glinted on the derringer in Briggs' hand. "This time I shan't miss," he announced, and squeezed the trigger.

Brant van Werff was stepping backward, slowly, like a man who wades waist-deep in water. Across his throat, above the velvet collar of his tunic, a red stain was spreading, soaking through the broadcloth, darkening the dark blue of his coat a deeper shade, and in his eyes was unbelieving horror as he turned them on his wife. He tried to speak, but something stopped his mouth. He swallowed it, threw up his hands like one who fights for breath, and gasped a single word: "Lysbeth!" Then he went down so quickly that the impact of his limpness on the floor was like a hollow echo, jarring the bright-polished brasses by the empty fireplace, starting little tinkling chimings from the cream-jars and the perfume-flacons on the dressing-table.

"Oh, Hal, why did you do it? He was hurt, you could have got away——"

Calmly, her brother blew down his derringer barrel to clear away the smoke-sediment. "It wasn't quite so simple," he replied. "He spotted me among the mob this afternoon. I was as good as hanged already, and so, my dear, were you. Don't you think that they'd have found out how we used the information in the letters that he wrote you? Come, help me with him. No one heard the shot, apparently; we'll leave him in the street."

Panting from exertion, Marianna leaned against the doorpost. "Wha—what was it he said before he—just as he was——"

Her brother wiped a blood spot from his fingers daintily. "It sounded like a woman's name, 'Lysbeth'."

"What could that have meant——"

"My dear, sweet, simple sister, why so naïve? It's fairly obvious the noble, patriotic Captain had another interest of the heart besides your charming self. I've always heard that dying men call on the thing most dear to them."

HE SAT upon the terrace at the front of the old house, turf-ringed flagstones underfoot, boughs of new-leafed oaks above, the scent of early roses in the air. From the bay the lawn curved softly upward, rising in twin knolls to right and left as though it were a giant, tender bosom nourishing plant and tree and bush. Some time ago the sun had set; now a sickle moon shone in the sky, its thin-cut image faintly mirrored in the softly swelling wavelets of the Chesapeake.

How long had he been here? A week . . . ten days . . . a month? What did it matter? When one is quits with life it makes small difference where he is, or for how long. Like a motion picture spooled through the projector in reverse his recent past flashed on his memory-screen.

The Joralemon Street Station, Baltimore, Annapolis, then here. Before that, going through the old house in Cranberry Street, himself a ghost among the linen dust-slips and the gray festoons of cobweb. This he would keep, that he would send to the salesrooms, finally the selling of the house itself, with another signing for him as trustee, since convicts who have lost their civil rights cannot contract or be contracted with. And civil death had been part of his punishment. Tandy van Werff, tennis champion, polo player, holder of the Médaille Militaire and the Croix de Guerre with palms, was a legal corpse until such time as, after due petition, the Government should see fit to restore his civil rights. "To hell with 'em!" he'd muttered as he left the penitentiary. He'd see 'em damned before he'd whine for pity. He was beaten flat by fate's relentless bludgeoning, but his hard, high pride still held. A van Werff did not cry quarter.

He had been too young to fight, barely seventeen, when war broke out in Europe, but he drove a car with skill and reckless daring which brought him up repeatedly before the traffic courts. Almost before the Central Powers reached Liège he was piloting a Ford "puddle-jumper" in the Section Sanitaire. Then l'Escadrille Lafayette, and finally, with scars and ribbons thick upon him, the American air force.

When a man is barely twenty-one and for four years has grinned back derision in the bare-boned face of Death, he does not take to peacetime ways with ease. He was trained to no profession, being barely out of prep school when he went to war; the thought of selling bonds or real estate or clerking in an office made him retch. He could not go to school. One who has acted as pallbearer for an era and crowded more of life into four years than most men live in eighty cannot rub elbows with a herd of callow undergraduates or sit with patience through the lectures of a faculty of cloister-bred professors.

Raw death demands raw life, and Death had been his bedfellow and boon-companion since before a morning shave accompanied his daily shower. He had thought of America as a place where life ran high, untainted by the saturnalia of blood which had drenched Europe. Within a month of his return he longed for Montmartre as a country boy may long for green fields

in the city. Even burdened with its war restrictions, Paris was a place of life. Humanities still kept their freshness there, the nights were filled with soft and meaning voices, amorous glances . . . amorous little hands and lips . . . those who ride a joust with Death at dawn have little use for sleep the night before.

Repatriation was an anticlimax. Professional reformers held his native country in a grip more stultifying than that which Samuel Parris fixed on Salem Village. Save in the painfully bohemian rendezvous of Greenwich Village or the speakeasies which were already starting to spread like a chain of leprous lesions, he met with no response to shouts for "more wine and madder music!"

One night he had a breakdown on the Merrick Road and when a passing truck offered a lift to Brooklyn he accepted gladly. Just outside of Freeport they were set upon by hijackers. The man beside him tumbled back, ripped through the shoulder by a slug, and automatically he snatched the wounded gangster's Thompson submachine gun. Here was life again! The reek of cordite fumes, the vicious *spat* of bullets splintering wood, the almost soundless muttered blasphemies of men who dared to tweak the feathers from the wings of Death. With instinctive accuracy he fired, and as his gun spewed havoc, burst into a roaring chanson:

". . . elle rit, c'est tout l' mal qu'ell' sait faire,
Madelon, Madelon, Madelon!"

They crashed the ambush as a dogfish crashes through a herring-seine, and as the bootleg truck careened toward Brooklyn, Tandy dressed the wounded mobster's shoulder. From Freeport to Brooklyn his companions praised his "noive," whispering fulsome compliments from the corners of their mouths. When he left them at the Museum station of the Eastern Parkway subway they pressed a dirty card into his hand and invited him to come and see "d' boss" next afternoon.

Joe Lanzilotti, sometime barber, later saloonkeeper, most lately interested in "the numbers," was among the first to scent potential fortune in a national thirst which seemed only to have been salted by the legislatures' pious fiats against alcoholic beverages. Quickly branching from the retail to the wholesale market he sold his speakeasy in Bleecker Street and devoted himself to supplying others with increasingly popular "wet goods." From Montauk Point or nearer places on Long Island he brought in smuggled liquor, cut it thriftily until one bottle took the place of four, and sold it at a profit past the wildest dreams of avarice. Being well known in the trade and having earned a reputation for delivering goods on time, he suffered from no competition, except when hijackers waylaid his caravans. Accordingly, just as mediæval merchants hired bands of free companions to defend their argosies against Barbary pirates, he enrolled a squad of sharpshooters to defend his shipments. Good trigger men were hard to get, however, and harder still to keep. Theirs was not a trade conducive to longevity, and better offers lured them to Chicago or Miami where the technique of their calling was in great demand. So when enthusiastic henchmen told him of the swell guy who had helped them shoot a breach through Frankie Bruno's gang the night before he was most favorably impressed. At half-past four next afternoon he greeted Tandy with a show of friendship he reserved for those who could be useful to him.

What Joe saw pleased him greatly: A young man, twenty-five or -six, perhaps, slightly but compactly built, with a lean, tanned face already starting to harden into lines of power; a man who used broad A as naturally as he wore his English-tailored suit of Harris tweeds without a sign of discomfort in July. There was neither truculence nor mock-ferocity in the heavy-lashed gray eyes that sized him up so coolly but with the gangster's instinct Lanzilotti knew that he'd prefer to stand clear if the other held a pistol or machine gun.

What van Werff saw was not so pleasing: Behind the broad, flat-topped oak desk a man of less than middle stature, dark-skinned, curly-haired, and black-eyed. His gray, almost white suit had been pressed in knife-edged creases, from his breast pocket spilled a gray-silk handkerchief, he had been freshly shaved and manicured, and exuded a faint odor of lilac perfume. His brown skin shone as if it had been rubbed with oil; his eyes danced with a light more sinister than merry; his full, too-red lips framed a smile more nearly contemptuous than good-humored.

However deviously his mind might work, Joe Lanzilotti's methods were direct, always. "Thanks for the help you give us last night, pal," he said, and counted out five hundred-dollar bills across the desk. "Just an insurance premium, see. We don't want we should owe nobody nothin'."

Van Werff was equally direct. He could use five hundred dollars. "Would you like to buy insurance regularly?" he asked as he folded the bright yellow bills and thrust them into his pocket.

A NEW character had been added to the underworld's dramatis personæ. From South Brooklyn to the Bronx the mobsters spoke respectfully of The Duke and his assistants. Few were privileged to know him, even those who hired him had no idea what his real name was, for interviews were brief and to the point; generally Joe Lanzilotti acted as the go-between, making all arrangements, collecting fees and personally guaranteeing satisfaction.

Frankie Bruno passed out quickly, dying bloodily if not heroically when The Duke and three tommy-gun experts chased his seven-thousand-dollar limousine for a mile down Brooklyn's Fourth Avenue and finally crowded it against the curb at Thirty-ninth Street. His gang vowed bloody vengeance; The Duke machine-gunned his entourage when they gathered for his obsequies with all the aplomb he had shown when he bombed German ammunition dumps.

Steadily the toll mounted, until to let it be known one had hired The Duke's protection was almost tantamount to immunity. But when Nick the Greek gave out information he had bought The Duke's services without first taking care to pay the usual retainer, Nick became the *pièce de resistance* at a sumptuous funeral. After which nobody thought it wise to take The Duke's omnipotent name in vain.

Meanwhile Tandy van Werff bought himself a little house of eighteen rooms near Easthampton, leased a duplex suite in Park Avenue and gathered honors as a polo player and a tennis champion. If his friends were puzzled by his sudden affluence they did not worry over it. Anything could happen in an era when domestic servants and bus boys and waitresses in short-order restaurants were operating in the stock market, when respectable brokers negotiated loans to finance liquor syndicates and legislators, tipsy till they had

to grasp their desks for support, rose to extol Prohibition as "the greatest moral victory since Emancipation."

HEIDI was exquisite. From the topmost of her little, childishly-tight blond curls to the pink tips of her childishly-small toes she was lovely as a Watteau shepherdess or a Hebe sculptured out of living marble by Praxiteles. She had little formal education, but she knew life thoroughly. New York had been her oyster, and when its opening had proved a harder task than her few talents could accomplish she had fallen back upon the most effective weapons of a pretty woman. Her odyssey was not unique: hat-check girl in a night club, next cigarette vendress, then a member of the chorus, finally a place she called her own that overlooked the Hudson and the Jersey Palisades. Her friend, protector and provider bore the patronymic Theophilatos, but in his working hours he was known as Nick the Greek.

Misfortune came to Nick one night by way of a machine gun in the practised hands of Tandy van Werff, alias The Duke; whereupon the lovely Heidi went to Tandy as part of the spoils of war, and things continued much as they had been.

Hoodlums came and went. Some died kicking with machine-gun slugs in their vitals, some suffered sudden death beneath the wheels of furiously-driven motor cars, some were fished up from the river in a shocking state of putrefaction, the picture-wire bound about their wrists and legs and necks proclaiming that they were not suicides. A few were taken by the law, but this was little matter for concern, since skilful lawyers could be hired at a price.

Tandy never bothered with such minor annoyances as the income tax. How could a man in his profession make returns? Under Income from Business: "Rubbing out Dutch Pete, $1,000?" Under Business Expenses: "Thirty gross machine bullets, $180"?

Hardly!

Little, pretty Heidi found a way to use her little, pretty pink-tipped fingers while The Duke was out on business. She didn't find much, just a few old pads of check-stubs, showing what he had deposited in a ten-month period, and the name of a bank where he kept some safe deposit boxes.

But that was all the Treasury Department needed.

Her voice was charming, cultured, musical, when they called on her to testify against him. Only her eyes were slightly repellant because of their hardness and their disillusion. She did not look away, she looked full at him while the damning words fell softly from her painted lips—while she identified the check-stubs and told how she'd discovered where he stored his private records—and her slow words, heavy with contempt, carried all the impact of a physical assault.

After all, she had been Nick the Greek's girl friend. Indeed, as it developed, she had been his lawful, wedded wife, and was the mother of his two-year-old daughter. And so she was, a trifle—just a very little—heroically, his avenger, also.

They sentenced him to ten years at hard labor, and the warden took them at their word. No office work, no school teaching for this man sentenced for an income tax evasion because they could not prove the score and more of killings which they knew he had committed. The rock pile, the machine shop, the jute mill and the laundry were his portion while the sands in Time's hour-glass slowly mounted to a pyramid

of ten years. Then they turned him free, a tall lean man of thirty-seven, looking fifty, with gaunt features and hair as gray as pewter.

His old haunts were no more. Repeal of Prohibition had smashed the crime trust's golden backbone. The criminal no longer enjoyed social sanction, gangsters and hoodlums were no longer tolerated by law-respecting citizens; now they could buy their liquor legally, and those who still clung to the rackets as a means of livelihood were Ishmaels with every man against them and relentless law-enforcement officers giving them no rest. There was no more place for him in this new social order than there had been in the old when he returned from war.

His house out on Long Island had been long since sold to satisfy the fines assessed against him; only the old family home in Brooklyn and the place in Maryland remained. He sold the city house and came here to the quiet peace of Anne Arundel County, where a living dead man might sit tranquilly and wait the sundering of flesh and spirit.

The call for help came suddenly as lightning from a still sky, quavering eerily across the starlit water. For half a minute he sat listening; then it came again, pleading, sharp-edged, then with mortal fear. Next instant he was charging full-tilt down the sloping lawn, flinging coat and shirt away, pausing for an instant at the sand to slip off trousers, then in tennis shoes and shorts to dash across the pebbly shingle and out into the gently-murmuring water.

He swam swiftly with double overarm stroke, heading straight as a launched crossbow bolt for the white arm waving a distress sign ninety yards from shore. For an instant he reared up and shouted, "Keep afloat, I'm coming!" then thrust his face into the waves again and sprinted toward the drowning woman.

Now he was beside her and had braced an arm beneath her shoulders. The faintly star-illumined light struck on her face as he supported it, and in spite of his exhaustion and the urgent need for haste he paused a moment, treading water as he looked at her. An eery feeling ran through him. As one who comes upon a place entirely strange to him may suddenly exclaim, "I know this—I've been here before!" he knew this woman's features as an aging man can limn the face of his first sweetheart in his memory, or a long-forgotten song is suddenly remembered in entirety. It was like a face long imagined suddenly become real: abundant chestnut-colored hair rippling with rich shadow-laden waves, a small and pointed chin, a small, straight nose whose delicately cut nostrils seemed to palpitate above the full-lipped crimson mouth, purple eyes with long, dark, curling lashes. . . .

He struck out for the shore, swimming easily, for she was almost bubble-light, and, now that he had come and she was not in momentary peril, she was composed enough and gave him no trouble.

Arm-stroke — kick! Arm-stroke—kick! he cleft the scarcely-curling waves, then:

"O Lord, have mercy!" A little distance off, but swinging nearer in a series of concentric circles, was the blue-black dorsal fin of a great shark. This was no porpoise, no cetacean—he knew the lumbering antics of those ocean clowns. This was a shark, a killer. He had seen its kind in the sea off Morro Castle at Habana. What it did so far north he had no idea; that it was near, and circling nearer, there could be no doubt.

Desperately he beat and churned the

water. The fin wavered, veered away a little, then edged closer.

With agility born of despair he drew his foot up, wrenched a tennis shoe away and hurled it at a spot three feet or so before the fin. His aim was good, and for a moment the astonished shark gave water while Tandy struck out for the shore with every ounce of his remaining strength.

Ten yards—fifteen—he had gone when the warning of V-shaped ripples gliding back from V-shaped fin told him the shark had returned to investigate. Once more he doubled up and tore a shoe away, once more hurled it at the curious, deadly monster; again he had a moment's respite.

She was growing heavier, heavier by the second. No mere buoyancy about her; it might have been an iron statue which he sought to bring to land. Time and again her dead-weight bore him down; his mouth was filled with water repeatedly, his breath came laboredly, all strength was gone from him.

By a supreme effort he raised his head above water. There was the shore, not fifty feet away. The beach shelved sharply here, he'd swum over every inch of it, and knew it as he knew his garden paths. Six feet—ten feet away, at most — was shallow, knee-depth water. If he could let her go . . . the shark was just behind, less than twenty feet away. He set his teeth: "The van Werffs don't cry quarter!"

Gangster, killer, ex-convict he might be, but he was a van Werff, a gentleman, a graduate of Adelphi and Poly Prep, a medaled soldier. What was it Sydney Carton said before the guillotine blade fell—"It is a far, far better thing that I do now than I have ever done?"

With all of his remaining strength—"Help me, Lord, just this one time!"—he thrust the woman from him and saw her struggle feebly for a moment, then rise to her knees. Then he slid back into the deep water like a plummet broken from its string.

The shark was waiting. . . .

Out and out, beyond the bounds of farthermost infinity, the great plain stretched, level, changeless, monotonous as a waveless sea. All round about him was a thick mist, not gray, not brown, but a blending of both shades. His frightened spirit shuddered in the chill of it, and with a dread that knew no boundaries, for in a flash he had been given memory: He knew himself as Adrian, as Brant, as Tandy, always with the same surname, ever faring under an ill-fated star because of the great perfidy he committed against love and trust.

Somehow, though, he seemed a little different. He had feeling, of a sort. He knew the fog was cold, cold with the utter chill of interstellar space, and the freezing bitterness of it gnawed at him like a starving wolf.

But now the mist was lifting. The fog about him changed from tawny to steel gray, then to clear, bright rose. And with the light She came. Beautiful as the morning when it comes to end a night of storm she was; her chestnut-colored hair, rippling with rich shadow-laden waves, hung down her shoulders and each side her face. Her little, pointed chin was perfect, as was her small, straight nose whose delicately cut nostrils seemed to palpitate above her full-lipped, crimson mouth. About her clung a robe of palest lavender tissue—or was it plastic, fabricated light?—and from beneath its hem her feet shone, white as ivory tipped with pearl-shell, slender, small, exquisite.

These things he saw, and, seeing, rec-

ognized her. "Lysbeth——" he began, then faltered into silence at the glory of her eyes. Love was in them, love and trust and pride—and a devotion which could know no wavering. "Lysbeth!" he breathed once again, and fell prostrate before her.

A light touch rested on his shoulder, and he felt a thrill of warmth glow through him. The coldness of the fog no longer bit into his bones. He was alive.

"Do you—can you—oh, I am not worthy, even, of your hate, but if you'll say that you can some day forgive me——" he faltered.

"Beloved!" Softly spoken, the three syllables were like an absolution and a benediction. "Long and long ago I did forgive whatever little hurt you did me, but it was not mine to pronounce pardon till your soul was purified by suffering, dear. Oh, how I've wept to see you bound tight in the web of circumstance, betrayed, deluded, mocked—but it was I who helped you at the last, dear love. I prayed to be allowed to go to you as you sat by the water, and to help you step across the barrier that separated us—I knew that you'd not fail me, that when it came to choice between a dreadful death and rescuing a woman you had never seen with fleshy eyes, you would not falter. I had faith in you——"

"It was that faith that gave me strength!" he whispered.

Her hands were in his, now, and from her touch he found the strength to stand. "Come, my dear, my very love," she bade him gently.

"Whither do we go?"

"Unto the City Beautiful. Behold!" She pointed, and in the distance showed a city walled about with walls of jasper, and its towers, reaching to the very vault of heaven, seemed made of diamond, emerald and ruby. No sun or moon or stars shone on it, but from its heart there seemed to emanate a light that combined all the glory of the midday sun, the beauty of the moon at full and the twinkling radiance of the stars at once.

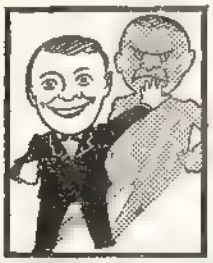
"And do I—shall I live there?"

"Always and for ever, heart of mine."

"But surely, when I have grown old——"

"Yonder is neither age nor death nor pain nor tears nor weeping, very dearest. Come."

Then suddenly the fog which hovered round about was filled with music more majestic than the organs of the great cathedrals when they thunder forth the Resurrection pæans at Easter and the mighty choirs take the joyous anthem up. So, hand in hand. they walked into the City Beautiful.



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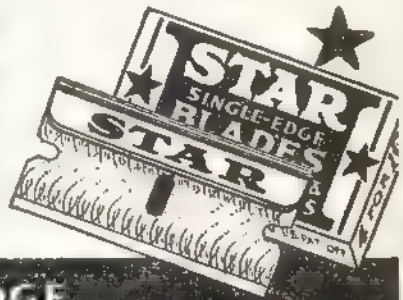

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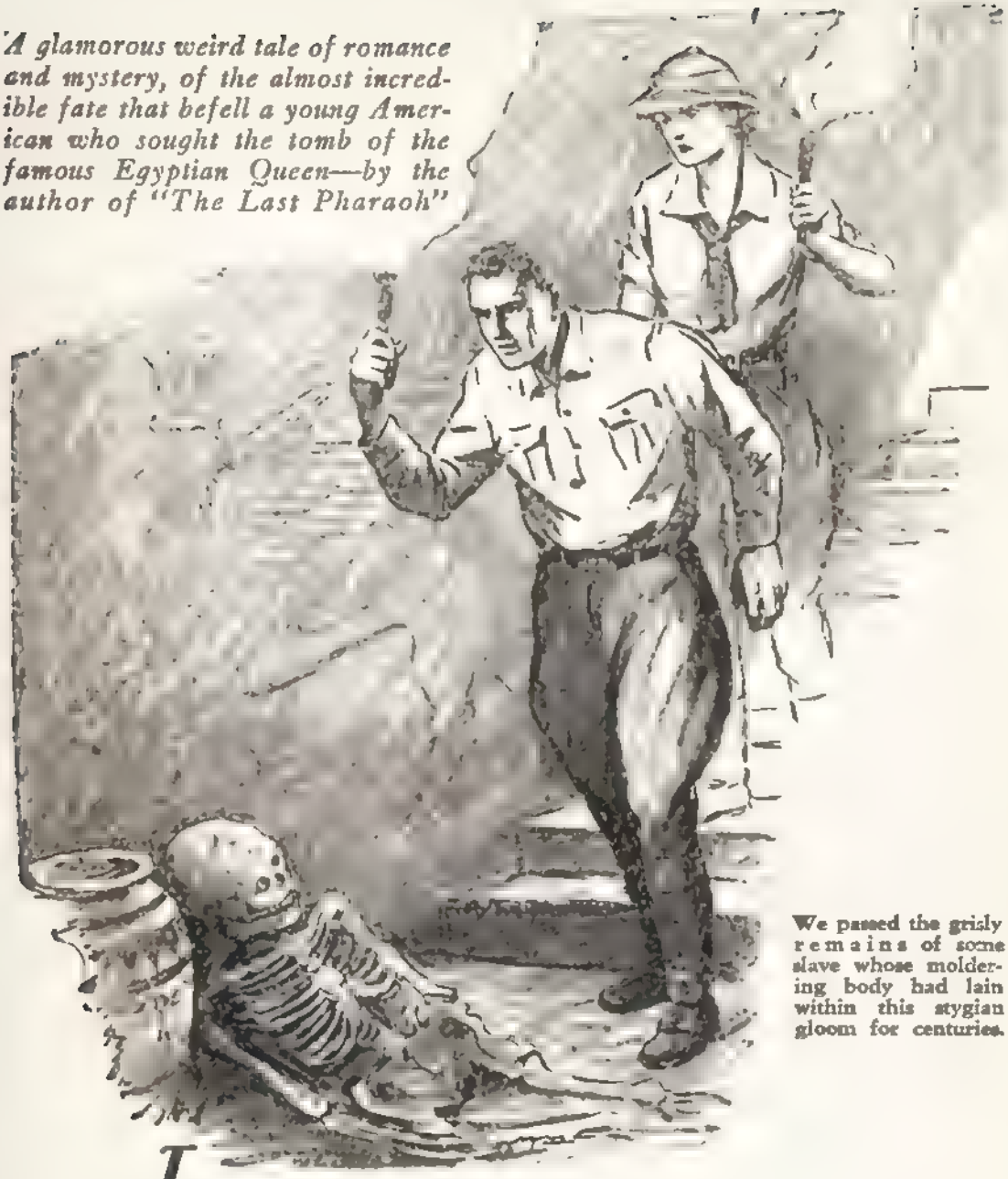
FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

A glamorous weird tale of romance and mystery, of the almost incredible fate that befell a young American who sought the tomb of the famous Egyptian Queen—by the author of "The Last Pharaoh"



We passed the grisly remains of some slave whose moldering body had lain within this stygian gloom for centuries.

I Found Cleopatra

By THOMAS P. KELLEY

The Story Thus Far

BRIAN O'HARA, young two-fisted American lawyer, has inherited the ancient Egyptian scroll which tells that the body of the great Queen Cleopatra lies in the heart of a mountain in the innermost part of the Sahara Desert — "not dead, but sleeping." Eventually the story of the parchment reaches the press, which re-

This story began in WEIRD TALES for November

sults in the phone call of one Manuel De Costa, who offers to buy the scroll.

The night previous to the arranged meeting, O'Hara, in his New York hotel room, is startled by the appearance of a mysterious and ravishingly beautiful woman, who warns him of De Costa, and agrees to meet him in far-off Dakar, on the West African coast, and guide him to the tomb. Bedazzled by her charms, O'Hara agrees, and The Midnight Lady departs with the words that she once knew Cleopatra.

Thwarted in his attempt to obtain the scroll, De Costa enlists the aid of the underworld, but the powerful fists of the fighting O'Hara enable him to escape a carefully baited trap and a dozen thugs. Later, aboard ship on the way to Dakar, his stateroom is entered by a weird, beast-like human, whose savage attack tells his purpose. Once again, however, the great thews of the young American come to his aid, and after a fierce struggle the shaggy intruder is routed. Abandoning all caution O'Hara follows in pursuit, but by a clever ruse is caught off guard and pitched into the Atlantic.

A wave-tossed derelict enables him to reach shore after hours in the sea. Landing on the African coast, and following a series of wild adventures that include an airplane flight far inland, O'Hara finds himself at the Lost Oasis, a little mud fort in the innermost part of the great Sahara, where The Midnight Lady and twenty of her followers are besieged by half a thousand of De Costa's savage raiders.

O'Hara tells his beauteous employer that though he has lost the scroll he still remembers the crude drawing that marked the location of the tomb—one that The Midnight Lady instantly recognizes as the wild Three Sisters Mountains. At dawn De Costa's raiders attack, and after a valiant defense the fort is taken and O'Hara left for dead. The hardy American comes to himself to find The Midnight Lady has been carried off, and her warriors slain.

He is following the trail of the raiders in pursuit, when a young Arab he has met, and who at first seemed friendly, wheels and orders him to throw up his hands, at the same instant a score of white-robed horsemen come riding toward them.

The story continues:

Part II

7. *Captives Three*

As the young Arab shouted his command, and the desert riders charged toward us, I stared in speechless wonderment at the swarthy traitor, while I slowly raised my hands.

There was no time even to plan, let alone try and escape. In a moment we were surrounded by the horsemen, and I was a prisoner once more. Yet this was scarcely minded in the wild rage that swept over me. To snap the neck of that lying fiend whose treachery had caused my capture was all that seemed to matter, and despite the rifle pointed at me I believe I would have sprung forward to attempt it, had not several of the raiders, foreseeing my intentions, leaped between us.

There was no hesitancy on the part of my captors. With grimy hands clutching me on every side, I was hustled to the horses, and then with arms securely bound, was thrown up behind one of the mounted Arabs. The treacherous Abdul had swung into a saddle, and now as he spoke a few words (for he was evidently one of authority among them) the entire party mounted, and followed in his wake.

For several hours we rode toward a range of low mountains, to enter them finally through a narrow and rocky pass. At its far end we came upon a dreary plain that stretched away to the horizon. But directly ahead of us, a mile or so distant, was the sight that at once claimed my attention—a lofty, square and cliff-sided mountain, whose flat top might have been a square mile in area.

Toward this we galloped, to enter the base of its thousand-foot walls through a narrow and jagged passway, at the entrance of which four fierce-looking Arabs with ancient muskets stood guard. A few words were exchanged between them and our leader, and then the entire party of horsemen passed through the opening in single file, to advance along its upward-sloping and winding path, where six determined men might well have stood off an army.

At times the trail would widen to such an extent that a dozen feet or more separated the wall from the rocky edge; then again it would narrow till only a scant thirty inches of pathway stood between the cliff that our horses hugged, and the terrible drop beside them; but never for an instant did the little company falter, and presently we emerged from that jagged world of stone to the small and clay-built city on its top.

Here a long and narrow avenue was lined with huge pillars, on the opposite sides of which rose the dwellings of the mountain people, many of them either fallen or crumbling to ruin. At the far end of the street stood a mosque topped with a slender spire, beside which rose a lofty tower. The few Arabs who walked the avenue eyed us in silence, but no word passed between them and the horsemen.

Before one of the smaller houses whose barred windows told its purpose the raiders halted. Here a couple of their members pulled me from my mount and hustled me within its tiny entrance to a bare and cheerless room. There, after trussing my feet up to meet my bound hands, and with a few taunts of impending torture, I was left alone, and heard their retreating footsteps.

No one had bothered to offer me either food or drink since my capture, and as a result, I suffered considerably from thirst. Several times an Arab guard made a brief appearance, but his only response to my request was a taunting laugh.

Just before dusk several men came to the room where I lay. All were in Arab dress, but the costly apparel of one of their number clearly showed his importance. The latter it was who now advanced toward me, and as the silken folds of the garments that had concealed his face fell away, I beheld the sneering features of Manuel De Costa.

"Ah, Señor O'Hara, this is indeed a pleasure," he began, "and but proves what a fickle jade is fate. When last we met it was amid the lights and roars of a great city, and now again our paths have crossed in the heart of the Sahara."

His features changed to an ugly scowl.

"But why do you not rise and greet me? Get up!" he shouted with an oath. "Get up, you swine! Up, I say!" And drawing back his booted foot he sent it crashing into my unprotected face. "And here is another, and another," he said, sending a volley of kicks to my side and shoulders.

The watching Arabs roared with laughter.

"I won't bother to ask how you managed to reach shore, for I can guess," he spoke when his attack had ended. "I won't bother to ask what brought you here, for I already know. I can tell you, however, that before I have finished with you, you will wish a thousand times over that some shark had got you long before you ever put foot on the African coast."

I made no reply, nor had I even as much as looked upon the Spaniard after that first glance of recognition. That this indifference infuriated him was evident in the rage that shook his voice when he spoke.

"I have heard you are a very strong man, Señor O'Hara," he said after a pause, adding almost immediately: "Now I for one am anxious to see just how strong you really are. There are various ways it could be done. I might call upon my hardiest warrior to meet you in a hand-to-hand combat, but that would hardly extend you to your full capabilities. I might arrange for another meeting with Zu-Tag (the shaggy one you encountered on the liner), but from what I have heard, even he might go down before the powerful fists of the fighting American.

"No; I think I have a better plan. On the morrow, then, I propose that we all assemble in the square, where a pair of horses will be attached to each of your limbs. Of course if you are stronger than the four of them, no harm shall have been done."

A smile flashed to his thin face.

"If, however, they should prove to be stronger than you—ah, in that case I fear we shall have two Señor O'Haras where formerly there was only one."

A few minutes after this the Spaniard made his departure, and again I was alone. But not for an instant had I doubted his words. Even in the few days that were mine in Africa, I had heard enough of Manuel De Costa to realize that his threats were no idle bluff, and that if I did not make an escape this night, I would never live to see another.

I had been lying there about two hours after "The Wolf" left me, when the door was again opened and a man entered, holding a torch, for darkness had long fallen. Had my hands been free I would have throttled him, for it was none other than the Arab whose treachery had caused my capture—Abdul.

A guard was at his heels, but he ordered the latter back and closed the door behind him.

"You fiend!" I snarled.

"Hush!" he whispered, leaning over me. "The very walls have ears, and if I am heard we shall both die horribly. I meant you no harm, white man, and spoke only words of truth when I said I would help you. But for me to be shot as a traitor would have helped neither of us. As I talked to you beside my uncle's body, I saw we were surrounded, and your capture a certainty. I would have shared it had I hesitated, so I took the one course and captured you myself. It was the only way to hold their confidence. Your own sense will tell you that."

This threw a new light on the matter, so I checked my anger and asked what he proposed to do.

"To help you, as I promised," he answered. "But it will be no easy task. Even if you are able to descend the pass and gain the desert below, swift horses are sure to follow. During my years in the stronghold of 'The Wolf' I have never heard of a captive escaping, although several have tried it and——"

"But I cannot leave alone," I interrupted. "I came here to find another

—two others. I dare not leave without them."

"Yes, I know," he whispered, looking around. "I know well whom you seek. 'The Wolf' holds her prisoner in the tower at the far end of the city. But the other, the French flyer—it is too late to save him."

"You mean——"

He nodded. "Yes; tortured and slain.

"But we must act quickly," he went on. "I may yet be able to save you. First I will free you from your bonds, but you must remain here, and in such a position that should the guard happen to look into the room he will suspect nothing. When you hear a whistle you will make your bid for freedom. The tower you seek is at the far end of the street. What dangers lie between it and you, Allah alone knows. I will arrange to have two horses waiting for you at the bottom of the pass, but beyond that I can do no more."

He knelt beside me, his strong hands grasping my bonds, and a moment later I was free. The automatic taken from me earlier in the day was then handed to me, and I secreted it in my clothing. From first to last the visit of the young Arab could scarcely have been three minutes.

"I must go now, or suspicion may be aroused," he spoke, rising. "Remember, then, when you hear my whistle you will know the street without is deserted, at least temporarily. It is then you must act. They have stationed a guard in the doorway, but he will probably be half asleep."

The door closed behind him.

SHALL I ever forget that terrible wait as I listened for his signal? Slowly the hours dragged along with each one seemingly a day. Ten—ten-thirty—then eleven. Within the little room was a tomb-like silence, broken only by the occasional murmur of some voice or sound from without. The uncertainty of the wait was maddening. Did it mean the treachery of Abdul had been discovered by the others? Or had the young Arab decided the risk was too great, and left me to carry on by myself?

It must have been well on to midnight before a long and welcome trill sounded softly from without.

That was all I waited for. As the shrill signal reached me I rose from where I lay, and treaded softly to the door. The narrow hallway ended against the wall beside me, but to the left it stretched past several rooms, similar to my own, to the street beyond. In the doorway a broad-shouldered Arab sat with his back toward me.

This was doubtless the guard that Abdul had spoken of. Scarce daring to breathe I tiptoed toward him. In my right hand I held the barrel of my heavy automatic in club fashion. I dared not use it in any other manner, as a gunshot was certain to arouse the inhabitants of the city, as well as the slightest sound might arouse the dozing man.

Softly I drew nearer. The silence within the little clay house was almost sepulchral, yet this but endangered my approach. Ten feet lessened to seven, to five, then three. I was within one pace of him now. I raised the barrel of my gun for the blow that would bring oblivion to the white-robed figure before me.

And then the man, as though warned by some subtle sense, suddenly sprang to his feet and faced me.

As the eyes of the Arab fell upon the figure that stood before him, they

snapped wide in terror. For a fraction of a second he glared at me; then his right hand darted for the wicked-looking knife in his belt, while his mouth flew open to scream an alarm. But before he could accomplish the latter act, the words were stopped in his throat. Even as he attempted it my left hand shot out and was at his windpipe, while its mate swung upward and descended with the butt end of the automatic in a terrific, smashing blow that crushed the man's features as he sank in a crimson mass.

Fearful of detection, I cast a glance around me, but none had witnessed that little tragedy. Dragging the unconscious guard inside the doorway, I gagged and bound him with the strippings from his own sash. Then, satisfied, I rose. For a time at least my crime should be safe, and in that interval there was much to be done.

A moment later found me on a silent, almost deserted street. Between me and its far end were the crumbling dwellings of the mountain people. Here prevailed a semi-gloom, but where the avenue terminated stood the slender-spired mosque, before which a huge campfire burned brightly, and around it sat a score or more of white-robed figures.

Just to the left of the edifice, and near the mountain's edge, rose the dark outlines of a lofty tower, a golden glow issuing from the window in its peak. This, then, was the fortress that held the lovely captive I sought to free.

Keeping in the shadow of the clay-built houses that lined the street before me, I drew steadily nearer to the tower that was my goal. The little huts themselves were so designed as to render each an individual fortress. From the roof of every dwelling a watch tower rose some eight feet skyward. Several of these being lighted made caution necessary, as I knew not at what moment a bullet might come whining through the gloom, from the gun of some sharp-eyed sentry who had discovered me.

And then I was brought to that sudden and terrible halt which even now comes at night to haunt me. There, nailed to the side of a dwelling—an unusually large one, of wooden construction—hung the mangled and twisted form of Captain Armand Sabbatier. For a moment I stood, with the wild glare of an idiot. The man had been spiked to the wall as a weasel is spiked to the door of a barn.

A hundred yards from the campfire I left the road, and circling quietly to the left, approached the tower on the side farthest from the Arabs. This, of course, considerably lessened any danger of detection, but it also robbed me of a visible means of entrance; yet it was highly improbable that I could have hoped to march past the Arabs stationed before the door, and gain entrance in that manner.

At the base of the tower I halted. High above me a light gleamed from its lofty window. It was there, I felt certain, I would find The Midnight Lady.

But how was I to reach her? The weird formation of the structure made climbing almost impossible. Projecting cylindrical stones, some six inches in diameter, surrounded the edifice in a series of bands, which—alas!—appeared only at five-foot intervals.

But there seemed to be no other way, and each moment brought nearer the dawn and discovery. Only for a moment I stood there, hesitant. Then with a rashness that must have been akin to madness, I slid the automatic into my belt, and with a prayer on my lips, began an ascent to the light above.

8. Flight

I WILL not attempt to describe that dangerous climb up the lofty tower, but at length my reaching hand found a hold on the sill of the window at its top.

Far below me the vastness of the Sahara lay in the starlight. The mountain top at the tower's base was dark and distant.

It seemed incredible that I had made that perilous climb. For a moment I paused to listen, fearful that some sound might have attracted those below; but only the whistling of the wind, the howls of the desert jackals, and once the lonely cry of some far-off night bird, came faintly to me.

I tensed my muscles for the final effort; then, pulling myself upward, I gazed into a bleak little chamber whose sole furniture consisted of a table, two chairs and a small cot. Upon the table burned the lamp whose radiance had attracted me from below; while just before it, looking steadily into its little flame, sat the wondrous captive.

As I raised myself above the sill, I caused the sound that sent her eyes toward me. A moment later I had entered the small room and was beside her.

"Hawks of Horus!" gasped The Midnight Lady in a whisper. "How came you here, Brian O'Hara?"

"Chance and the Arabs brought me to the city," I answered. "A miracle got me up this tower."

"But you were hit when they took the fort," she went on. "I saw you fall myself."

"Only a flesh wound—one that bled freely and gave me the gory appearance that must have convinced the Arabs I was dead. When I came to myself I took up their trail, which resulted in the capture that brought me here."

That and a few more words quickly explained my presence.

"And Captain Sabbatier?" she asked when I had concluded.

"He is—dead." I could not bring myself to tell of the torture that had marked his passing.

"His services will not be forgotten, nor shall yours, Brian O'Hara. If ever we reach the great halls of my own hidden city I will prove my gratitude, but first we must escape this stronghold of 'The Wolf'."

I nodded.

"They have guards before the tower door?" she asked.

"A score or more are gathered around the campfire. A few may be dozing, but I doubt if a shadow could get past the eyes and sharp ears of the lot of them. Then there is the trail itself," I added. "Doubtless as many more guard the pass leading down the mountain, as well as the entrance at its base."

"Perils we must risk," she answered. "Dangers we will have to meet and overcome as they present themselves. Until then they can neither harm nor help us. We must depend entirely upon ourselves, and the sooner we act the better. Come, let us see how far we can go toward freedom."

As she spoke, The Midnight Lady moved toward the doorway.

"You propose to descend the tower stairs to the exit below?"

"Exactly."

"But it will mean certain capture that way," I protested. "There are a score of Arabs less than sixty feet from the doorway."

"We can gain nothing by remaining here," she answered. "At least there is a chance. Who knows—if the smile of Isis be with us—that we may not creep past the dozing raiders? Once

in the street we will keep in the shade of the dwellings, where there is practically no fear of detection, and the pass that leads through the mountains might be unguarded."

"I doubt it. They have——"

We had been speaking in whispers so that the slightest sound might be discernible. Now, as the treading of footsteps reached us from without the door, we froze to rigidity and listened. Nearer they came, and nearer. There could be no doubt about it. Though the hour was well past midnight, someone was ascending the tower steps for the sole purpose of entering the room, and in another moment would be upon us.

It was The Midnight Lady who guessed the identity of this late caller.

"The Wolf!"

Together our eyes swept around the room for some place of concealment, but its bare walls offered nothing. A rat could hardly remain unseen. Of course I could have escaped detection were I on the outside of the tower, but there was no time now to exit through the window and make the attempt to escape.

There was but one chance. "The wall!" whispered my companion, and I flattened myself against its side, just as the door flew in to offer me the slight concealment behind its slender panels. The next instant Manuel De Costa strode into the room.

With my automatic held before me, I listened for some word to show that the Spaniard was suspicious of my presence, but it was evident that he had come for the sole purpose of seeing his lovely captive. For a moment he stood watching her before he spoke.

"I have long awaited this hour, Daughter of the Sahara. A triumph that even in my wildest fancy I have scarcely dared to hope for. Many times in the past we have captured those who were your followers, and on two occasions I have watched you from far-off sand-hills.

"But to have you here, a captive in my own mountain fortress——"

He gave a short laugh as he added: "Ah, but it is too perfect!"

"You will find the vengeance of my followers a swift and deadly one," she answered.

"My own is none too tender," continued the man in an even tone. "We still have the one you sent to spy on us some two years ago, though minus his eyes and tongue. He is now employed as a beast of burden. Then there is the French flyer, Sabbatier. You will find him nailed to the door of a house on the street without. As a matter of fact, the one unsolved solution is your own immediate future."

He was regarding her closely as he spoke, but if Manuel De Costa expected any sign of fear, he was doomed to disappointment. Only an amused indifference showed on the glamorous face before him.

"There is another," he went on, his voice rising at her continued smile, "the big American. Tomorrow I intend to test the strength of your muscular follower. Or perhaps I should have him dragged here, where together we could watch him share a fate similar to that of the Frenchman. Better, I might even——"

"Silence, gibbering jackal!" broke in The Midnight Lady. "Your blustering attempts to frighten are not only stupid but wearying as well. As to the American, if it is your intention to summon him, I will save you that trouble."

And her eyes signaled to me in the look that wheeled the Spaniard in his tracks.

NEVER in all my life have I seen such surprise as was shown on the face of Manuel De Costa. Astonishment, hate and anger sprang to his thin, swarthy features, on which I could also detect fear. In an instant The Midnight Lady was beside me, and the next had closed the tower door, and was holding my automatic on the man before her as she spoke two words:

"Bind him!" she ordered me.

For a moment I was puzzled as to how this could be done, but the discovery of a leather hanging on the wall soon solved that worry. I tore it into a number of strips, and tying the arms and legs of the Spaniard, carried and bound him to the cot, where, with a gag thrust into his mouth, he was soon a silent as well as a helpless prisoner.

At first the man had been loud in protest, but there was something about the eyes of The Midnight Lady that silenced him. It was evident to Manuel De Costa that nothing would have given the black-haired beauty greater pleasure than an excuse to send a stream of lead tearing into his heart.

Stopping only to transfer the belt and revolver of the bound man to my own person, I followed The Midnight Lady, to begin a careful descent of the spiral stairs that led from the tower room. It did not seem plausible that De Costa would have come to the tower unescorted, and any moment might bring us face to face with some armed warrior. But our caution was needless, as the narrow stairway was deserted.

At the heavy door in the tower's base we paused slightly; then, with revolvers held before us, softly pushed the barrier open to the starlit night without.

A short distance away a huge fire burned brightly. Around it lay a score of white-robed figures. Several others were sitting upright, but as none of them were faced directly toward us it was not strange that they failed to notice the two silent figures who issued from the tower and noiselessly hurried into the darkness.

Stopping only while I retrieved the heavy shoes I had discarded, we hastened on to the far end of the street, where began the pass that led through the mountain. It was here I expected to be halted, but it was evident that Manuel De Costa had no fear of an attack on his fortress, as its entrance was unguarded.

Down this we hurried to follow along its rocky pathway, and at the end of a quarter of an hour reached the opening at its ending. Here awaited a muffled figure with two horses.

"The words of Abdul were not false ones," he spoke as he swung into the saddles, "and his debt to you is now paid. May Allah go with you, but remember when next we meet it must be as enemies."

Out toward the blackness of the south we galloped, I following in the wake of The Midnight Lady who led our speedy way past the innumerable sand-hills and bumpy stretches that surrounded us. I had not the remotest idea as to our present whereabouts; it was enough that we were leaving the mountain city behind us.

But then again, the destination to which we were now hurrying was also unknown to me, nor would I have been any the wiser had I inquired. Secrecy was ever a characteristic of The Midnight Lady.

The first evidence of dawn was paling the east when a small oasis showed up directly ahead of us. Toward its welcome water we were galloping when a dozen or more black, almost naked figures, armed with only bows and arrows, appeared in the dim light around

it. As we drew nearer, several of them fitted arrows to their bow-strings, but a shot from my companion's revolver sent them hurrying into the dawn with cries of terror.

"Beri-Beri men," laughed The Midnight Lady, swinging from her saddle as we halted. "The most primitive of humans, and really quite harmless. They exist on the smaller animals their crude shafts can get them, as well as the large birds they catch by tethered traps concealed beneath the brushes and trees on which the birds feed."

Only for a few minutes did we rest beside the desert pool, then again took up our journey toward a low series of cliffs that rose in the distance.

"The warriors of 'The Wolf' are sure to follow," said my companion, "and among the cliffs we shall be reasonably safe. A score or more of little valleys offer ideal hiding-places, and there is a small cave in the heart of them, the entrance of which is known to me alone."

Steadily rose the rocky heights as our galloping mounts drew closer to the boulders at their base. The surrounding country was a barren waste—a desolate stretch of sand, and numerous hillocks, turfed here and there with tiny shrubs. Far to the east rose a gigantic mountain range, the very name of which was unknown to me.

The Midnight Lady, ever watchful, looked backward quite as much as she did ahead. At the top of each hillock she would draw in her horse, and with shaded eyes scan the desert to our rear. At last her scrutiny was rewarded. We were within a mile of the cliffs, when her silvery cry rang out:

"Look—behind us!"

I wheeled in my saddle at the words, and sure enough, there riding over the sand-hills on the horizon were a hundred or more white-robed figures.

In an instant The Midnight Lady showed her mettle.

"Ride for the cliffs—it's our only hope! If we reach them before they're upon us, we may yet escape!"

The Midnight Lady brought down the slender switch she carried with a crack that sent her horse leaping forward. I followed as quickly as possible, but it had been evident from the first that the mount I rode was far inferior to my companion's. Several times that morning she had been obliged to check her speed that she might not outdistance me, and only a short while before he had stepped into a sand-hole in an awkward fall that sent me flying over his head, to land on my hands and knees in a shrub heap.

It may have been that my heavy weight and poor horsemanship helped considerably to handicap the beast; but whatever the cause, each moment I dropped farther to the rear of the fleeing one before me, while the shouts and yells of our pursuers grew louder.

Lashing the sides of my mount, I kept him at the top of his speed, to reach the cliffs at last. The Midnight Lady had drawn in her own horse and was waiting, her eyes raised to the oncoming Arabs.

"To the left! To the left!" she cried. "We will divide here. Follow along the base of the cliffs—they end three miles to the south. Await me at the great rocks beyond them!"

"And you?" I shouted.

"I am going to teach those Arabs a lesson in fast riding. I will take the other side, and circle the cliffs by the longer route. I may be able to throw them off—and they are sure to follow me."

Then, as I hesitated: "Haste! They are almost upon us!"

As she spoke the last words, the great beauty swung her steed to the right and disappeared behind a projecting height, while a shout and a crack on its glossy rump sent my own jaded beast along the rocky stretch before me.

I had seen enough to realize The Midnight Lady was well able to hold her own with the Arabs in flight. I felt reasonably sure of her safety, and must now think of myself. I galloped hard for half a mile, and then looked back. The horsemen had reached the cliffs and were dividing, the greater part sweeping to the right and disappearing, while six or eight others were charging straight toward me.

The trail along the base of the cliffs was hard and stony, making it easy to tell by the drumming hoofs how far distant were my pursuers. For a while it remained at an even din, and then the clattering grew steadily louder, as though I were slowly but surely being overtaken. I looked back and found that the noise came from a single rider who was far ahead of the others, a tiny fellow whose light weight and splendid black horse had brought him into foremost place. If I did not stop him, he was certain to overtake me in a very few minutes.

I reached for the automatic at my side, but to my horror the holster was empty. It must have been shaken out earlier in the morning, when my horse had fallen. But I was not entirely unarmed. A short Arab sword hung from the saddle. I drew it from its leather scabbard and awaited my chance.

Before me a projecting height of the cliff resulted in a turn in the trail, and behind its concealment I resolved to make a stand, but whether I could reach it in time to execute my plan I was doubtful. Every instant the clatter of hoofs grew louder. A rifle bullet whined past my head, and was followed by a gust of crackling Arab oaths.

A dozen yards before my foe I reached the sharp turn in the trail, and in rounding it jerked on my bridle reins in the vicious tug that threw up my horse on his haunches. As we spun around, I met the rider face to face. The man gave a scream of surprise, but he was going too fast to stop, or do anything other than cry his amazement.

What followed was exactly as I had planned. The Arab's horse flew past me on the right, fully exposing the unprotected rider. And at the same instant I lunged over the neck of my own steed, and buried my sword in the man's body.

9. *The Secret of the Tomb*

As my sharp steel tore into his body, the Arab gave the high screech of a child. The next instant he had toppled to the trail and was rolling on its hard surface, his body twitching in the convulsive jerks that were destined to be his last.

My horse had already sprung in the wake of the other. I doubt if five seconds passed from the time I halted till flight had been taken up once more; yet even then I had scarcely covered a hundred yards when the first of the oncoming Arabs rounded the cliff.

The next instant there came a crash and a cry, and I turned in time to see a man and horse rolling on the ground in a cloud of dust, while rounding the cliff at a mad gallop came another, to go plunging headlong over the first. A minute later the trail was choked with a tumbling pile of men and horses, the yells and curses of the Arabs rising with

the frightened whinnies of their steeds. The horse of the leading rider must have fallen over the body of my victim, and this in turn had caused the obstacle that resulted in the following chaos.

In the wild confusion I was forgotten, but all this only aided me, and a moment later a bend in the trail carried me beyond their view. To the right a narrow pathway led through a gap in the cliffs, and on through the gorges and lumpy stretches that showed within. From the distance came shouts and the hoof-beats of many horses.

But it was the sight to the left that claimed my attention. Several hundred yards away rose a score or more of gigantic boulders, each fully the size of an ordinary house. And sitting in her saddle on the foam-bespeckled horse before them was The Midnight Lady, beckoning me imperiously toward her. A moment later my horse was in the shadows of the rocks.

"Follow me," she spoke briefly, then led the way in between the great boulders, just in time.

Loud chattering told that my pursuers had regained their saddles and once more taken up the chase. Scarcely had we put the rocks between us when they appeared in view, but again our luck held out. From the narrow trail within the cliffs came the shouting that had attracted me. The horsemen halted as the first sounds reached them. It must have come to them that I was responsible for at least some of it, as a moment later they had entered the gap, and with hoarse shouts were charging up the little trail before them.

"They are gone," spoke my companion. "Gone to find the others who are searching for me in the little vales and hills that lie within the cliffs. Our one chance is to see how many miles we can put between ourselves and them before the fools realize they have been tricked. Come!"

Putting spurs to her horse, The Midnight Lady set off at a mad gallop toward the south, while I urged on my own tired beast to follow in her wake.

All that hot day we pushed on at as fast a speed as our jaded horses would allow. A brisk wind had risen to blow the sand against our faces, while the horses blinked and whinnied their misery; yet there was no stopping the one who rode before me, though several times we did halt for a brief respite in one of the numerous ravines and gullies that lined our desolate way.

Every moment I expected to hear the shouts of our pursuers, but evidently our whereabouts was a mystery to them. Whether they had abandoned the trail after searching the cliffs, or continued on in some other direction, it is difficult to say; but we saw no more of them, nor was I again to see a hostile Arab for many days.

Night had fallen, and the sky before us mottled with a line of flame when we topped a huge sand-hill, to gaze on the scene in the valley below. Around a number of small fires sat a great company of white-robed men—behind which rose the outlines of innumerable tiny tents. Sentries had been posted here and there. Even as we topped the ridge several of them saw us, and their shouts sent the entire company leaping to their feet.

But now The Midnight Lady, who had been foremost that long day, cried out to them in an unknown tongue, before she turned to me, as her dark eyes flashed their joy:

"We are safe, Brian O'Hara! We are safe! These are the thousand warriors I have awaited. They have long been my hirelings, and ride and fight for me alone!"

It was four days later that The Midnight Lady and her thousand followers, together with myself, arrived at the base of the Three Sisters mountains.

There had been no hesitancy on the part of the beauteous one. Scarcely an hour after our arrival in the camp of her followers, she had ordered preparations for an early march on the morrow, and with the coming of dawn, at the head of her mounted company, had set out in quest of the tomb that had caused such adventure and bloodshed; but only the impenetrable fates knew of the dire consequences that lay before us.

During the four days of travel I had been in close association with the followers of The Midnight Lady, but as before, their origin and speech remained a mystery to me. Almost without exception, their eyes were almond-shaped and oblique, with long, thin brows, so black as to appear almost blue. In dress they were Arabian, to be sure, but there was something about the prominence of their cheekbones and slight African fullness of the lips that characterized them as a different race.

It was just dusk when we came to the base of the center peak of the wild Three Sisters mountains. A weird pall seemed to hang over the entire desolate wastes around us, that showed not even the smallest shrub or palm tree. High overhead rose the rocky, jagged heights, silent and sinister, the long untrodden cone-shaped peak, on whose top was supposed to lie the form of one whose name had gone down through the ages: Egypt's last and greatest Queen, and history's greatest beauty, Cleopatra!

That night we camped at the foot of the mountain, though it had been evident from the first that this would not have been the chosen site of the company, were it not for the command of their leader. The usual noise and laughter that marked the pitching of camp was noticeably absent, in the fearful, sidelong glances that were continually cast at the massive heights above, as well as the whisperings and gesticulations of the bolder members.

"They fear this mountain," said The Midnight Lady, as we stood together in the gathering darkness, watching the numerous fires being lit and the small tents rising. "It is the legends they have heard, wild stories handed down by their progenitors of the spirits and angry gods who are supposed to inhabit the peaks of the Three Sisters mountains. Fearless fighters they are, every one of them, but against the unknown they become as frightened little boys. I may have trouble with them on the morrow."

"Suppose they refuse to follow us?" I asked.

Her firm chin tightened.

"I'll make them follow us! There is too much at stake to be lost by silly fears and superstitions. The sarcophagus we seek lies on the mountain-top above us, and nothing short of death shall keep me from it. Yes; I will make them ascend with us and remove the heavy boulder that guards the tomb, if I have to force them on at gunpoint!"

But nothing could dispel that air of impending disaster. It was late before silence settled over the encampment. From the first there had been a perception that we were being watched from the heights above. There was nothing tangible that the eye could grasp—only the feeling that cruel, unseen eyes were staring steadily upon us.

Our sentries had been doubled, and stood ready with loaded rifles, but it was long past the accustomed hour

when the camp's followers sought their rest. Yet even then sleep was to be denied them. Occasionally would come the rifle shot of some nervous sentry, firing at what he claimed to be a dark form hurrying through the gloom just beyond the firelight; and then, at midnight, there rose that long drawn-out cry from the mountain-top—a wailing, sobbing cry, ending with a terrible laugh, that brought the entire company pouring from their tents in wild-eyed terror.

Early the next morning we were climbing the almost perpendicular sides of the central peak—the highest and wildest—of the Three Sisters. We had been forced to leave our horses and most of the warriors at the base of the mountain. The Midnight Lady selected twenty of them to accompany her, choosing only the sturdiest and most outstanding marksmen. There had been a noticeable lack of enthusiasm among the latter, but at length they reluctantly agreed to the climb.

It was nearly noon when the little party scrambled over the edge of the mountain and stood on the barren, almost level land on its top. Below us, on either side, rose a rocky, smaller peak than the one on which we stood. Far below were the white specks we knew to be the tents of the encampment we had left behind us earlier that morning. Behind it stretched the wastes of sand through which we had traveled the last four days.

But directly before us was that which centered the attention of the little band of climbers. It was a square and tiny mountain-top on which we stood; and rising directly from its center—the one break on its level surface—was a mound of earth, perhaps six feet in height, before which stood, like some giant sentinel, a huge granite boulder.

Toward this we now directed our steps, and at the words of The Midnight Lady threw our united strength against the stony barrier; but it required many efforts before it had been pushed aside, and the opening it concealed exposed to show a narrow flight of granite steps, evidently hewn from rock, leading down into the mound, to disappear at a sharp turning to the left, a dozen feet below.

It required considerable urging on the part of The Midnight Lady, and several times her hand had strayed to the automatic at her side in a suggestive manner before it had been accomplished, but now at the sight of the stone steps her white-robed followers drew back with cries of terror.

THE MIDNIGHT LADY turned toward me. "We must continue on from here by ourselves, Brian O'Hara. All the gold of Ophir could not induce these superstitious fools to enter the halls of eternal night that lie within this mountain. I will leave orders for them to await us here, but we shall have to brave the dangers of the dark ways by ourselves."

Two torches were lighted as she spoke a few words to her followers. Then, as the others watched, The Midnight Lady and I entered the gaping hole before us, and with ready revolvers descended the narrow stairs, to follow their sharp turn to the left as the warmth and sunlight faded behind.

Holding high the flaming torches, we groped farther and farther down a long and narrow corridor of tomb-silent blackness that had been hewn in the living rock. I recalled the words of the ancient parchment that told of the endless days the slaves of Egypt had toiled in lengthening the shaft, and realized the almost superhuman efforts

that must have been theirs in penetrating to the very bowels of the mountain, with only the crude chisels and other tools of those distant days to aid them.

All around us was evidence of a labor done two thousand years ago. The ancient corridor wound in a serpentine manner, as we entered ever farther into its unknown depths, with the sides rising to converge at its jagged top, a foot or more above us. The great boulder at its summit was evidence that it had long gone untrod, while the deep deposits of dust and debris substantiated this hypothesis.

On we went, several times passing the intersecting blackness of another, higher, winding corridor, and often hastening our descent by the aid of the stone steps that appeared at intervals. Occasionally on the walls and ceiling some grotesque carving frowned upon us, and once we passed the grisly remains of some warrior or slave, whose moldering body had lain within this Stygian gloom for centuries.

There was no way of knowing the exact time when man had first entered this great mountain. To be sure, the Egyptian, Kharmes, had written his own record some two thousand years ago, but there was that which led us to believe that it might have been penetrated by an older race, eons before. What else could account for that broad and high passage which so frequently crossed ours, as well as the great alcove we once beheld in the distance, where a score of men might easily have entered abreast?

For a long half-hour we groped our silent way. Suddenly the passage straightened out to run in a direct line, and a few minutes later our advance was stopped by a very heavy wooden door.

The beauteous face of The Midnight Lady turned toward me, her dark eyes flashing a wild joy.

"It is the room of the dead, Brian O'Hara!" she cried. "The room of the dead that lies in the heart of the mountain! Ah, the smile of Isis is indeed upon us. We have penetrated the halls of eternal night, and come, unharmed, to the tomb we seek!"

As she spoke the words, The Midnight Lady pushed back that age-old creaking door, to reveal at last the secret of the chamber of the dead.

It was a dark and cheerless little room we entered, a square and silent chamber whose jagged ceiling was but a foot or more above our heads. There was no continuance of the passage we had so long followed, nor any other means of entrance. Plainly the corridor ended in this subterranean vault, in the center of which stood a small stone altar.

And lying across the hard surface of that tiny elevation, in majestic silence, lay the slender outlines of a long-stilled body.

With one accord we moved closer.

It was the form of a young girl that was revealed in the torchlight, a pretty young girl with a coffee-brown complexion, who appeared to be but sleeping.

Her closed eyes showed their curling inch-long lashes, with a blackness almost blue. Her nose was exquisitely chiseled, almost Greek in its delicacy of outline. The slender arms that folded on her metal breastplates were encircled by numerous bands and bracelets. Her thick black hair was combed in a strange, yet becoming manner. A cobra-ensigned headband adorned the brow, while a filmy skirt revealed rather than concealed her shapely limbs.

Around us was a centuries-old, tomb-like silence.

"It—it is she?" I asked in a whisper. "It really is the great Queen, Cleopatra?"

The Midnight Lady appeared not to have heard. She was looking steadily at the silent form before her, and in the flickering torchlight, her own exotic charms were dazzling. True, the body on the altar was that of a very pretty young girl, but the beauty of the wondrous creature standing beside me was so vastly different, a flashing, barbaric glamor, both terrifying and glorious.

Suddenly she wheeled toward me.

"The great moment is at hand, Brian O'Hara! The great moment that must thunder the doom or triumph of the last Ptolemaic ruler. What I am about to do in the next few minutes may appear to you as the wild act of a maniac. What you are about to witness will come at night to haunt you. And yet the gods of old Egypt, who were present on that far-distant day when the dream was first conceived, know that its outcome has been the hopes, the prayers and schemings, of two thousand weary years!"

The Midnight Lady handed me her torch as she spoke, and from the pocket of her riding-breeches produced a small brown packet. A moment later she held aloft a gleaming, silvery object, whose narrow length and needle-like point sparkled in the torchlight.

"Hold high the torch!" she cried. "Hold high the torch that the serum of the wise Baltarus may be plunged into her veins, to recall from the mists of time one who has slumbered twenty centuries!"

And bending over the slender form, The Midnight Lady sank her needle deep into the arm of the sleeper on the altar.

And then we waited.

I doubt if either of us breathed for the next sixty seconds. The two torches I had thrust into a near-by crevice were our only light. Caught by a faint draft they cast fitful gleams and crackled, but all else was the silence of the tomb. Beyond their beams was the impenetrable blackness. The Midnight Lady had stepped two paces backward and was watching.

A moment passed, another—and then the eyes of the girl on the altar slowly opened.

I cannot clearly remember what I thought or did, though I have a vague recollection of standing in open-mouthed wonderment, as the eyes of the girl blinked in the torchlight and one arm was raised to shield them. I recall, too, her own startled features as her lithe body rose upward, and those same dark eyes looked into mine. Surprise, kindness and joy were all shown in that one brief glance, before it left me to find the rocky chamber's only other occupant.

And then the girl gave a violent start, a swift intake of her breath, as a wild fright sprang to her face, ere she slid from the altar, to throw herself upon her knees before The Midnight Lady and gasp out those two startling words in the tongue of ancient Rome:

"Your Majesty!"

10. Cleopatra

HIGH on the uppermost peak of the Three Sisters mountains, twenty white-robed figures stood around the gaping mouth of the dark pit leading downward—wide-eyed, watching, waiting; while far down in the heart of its great stony interior, in the silent little room that was the chamber of the dead, the flickering torchlight was revealing

a scene that had no equal since the world itself began.

"Your Majesty!" Yes; that was what the girl had said—words that rang out in that silent, jagged vault of stone, to continue on along the gloom of the corridor in a weird and haunting echo: "Your Majesty!"

Had I gone mad, or suddenly become the victim of some wild hallucination? There seemed nothing else that could explain the scene before me. On her knees, in the garments of old Egypt, a slender and almond-eyed girl bent low before a beauteous woman in riding-breeches and an open-necked shirt, a woman whose cork helmet and travel-stained garments were unable to hide her regal bearing. But even so, what could those wild words mean?

The eyes of The Midnight Lady suddenly raised to mine.

"And so you have learned that which has been a secret for twenty centuries, Brian O'Hara," she spoke in a quiet voice. "Yes, I indeed am the Queen of Egypt, the last Ptolemaic ruler, who first saw the light of day in the great palace of my father, the Pharaoh Auletes, two thousand and two years ago!"

"You—Cleopatra!" I gasped.

"A secret I have guarded through the ages; a secret that must continue to remain one till I see fit to have it otherwise."

What I might have said was silenced by a gesture of her hand. Turning, the Queen of Egypt raised the head of the kneeling girl before her.

"The Tree, Na-Ela!" she demanded in a Latin tongue. "The Tree of Life—where is it?"

The girl gave a half-sobbing, inarticulate murmur.

"The Tree of Life, Na-Ela!" cried the other sharply. "The Tree of Life! The world's first tree whose wondrous fruit endows two thousand years, less thirty-six—quickly, where is it?"

Again there was no answer. Indeed, there was hardly time for one before the girl turned an appealing look toward me, and then with a little cry, sank to the rocky floor. I had lifted her unconscious form upright when the Queen of Egypt spoke again.

"It is well. It is just as well. Though she has indeed survived twenty centuries, the wondrous powers of the drug have waned, and in her present condition anything she might have uttered could be both untrue and confusing.

"Carry her with us, Brian O'Hara," she added. "We will take the maid to the mountain's base, where presently I shall question her more fully."

Pausing only to wrest a torch from its rocky lodgment, the beauty who had dazzled Cæsar in the days of Roman conquest again led the way through those gloomy halls of night, while holding the unconscious and barbaric-clad girl, I followed to the warmth and sunlight at the beginning of the shaft.

THAT night one of the white-robed attendants came to escort me from my own little tent to the gorgeous silken structure at the far end of the encampment, that was the quarters of his mistress. Making our way among the intervening tents and campfires, we reached at last our destination, before which two armed guards stood a rigid watch. The attendant and I entered.

The Queen of Egypt wasted little time in salutation.

"I can understand your feelings at the happenings of the past few hours, Brian O'Hara," she began, as the attendant withdrew, "nor will I make any

comment upon them, other than to inform you that you are still sane, and may truly believe what you have seen and heard."

A tiny lantern was the only means of illumination within the silken tent, and in the rays of its feeble glow I watched the glorious Queen as she continued:

"By a strange fate you have this day come to know that which has been guarded from the outer world during the slow passing of the centuries. Oh, I fully realize that but for your ancient chart I might never have found the tomb, and am appreciative also that it was your own great muscles that rescued me from the stronghold of 'The Wolf,' and brought me through a hundred dangers to the mountain-top I sought."

Her eyes looked unblinkingly into mine.

"But I am mindful also of the tales your tongue might tell once you regained the outer world, and realize that for the time being it would be the height of folly to permit your returning to the coast."

"You—you mean I am to be held a prisoner here?" I asked.

Her answering smile showed that lovely row of perfect teeth.

"Not as a prisoner. No; not that, Brian O'Hara. Rather, let us say that you have been chosen as my aid and personal bodyguard. Your great size and fighting-ability stamp you as the most eligible of my followers, and it is a duty that will reward you handsomely. I recall that even at the beginning of this adventure you were promised the treasures to be found in the tomb, and can imagine your feelings on finding only a bare and cheerless little room of stone, but I assure you it is not my intention to let the American go unrewarded."

"And you wish——"

The Queen of Egypt nodded. "Stay with me," she went on in an earnest tone. "I have never had a greater need for one I can really trust than I shall have in the next few months."

"But all this," I cried, "this mystery! I must know more about it. It is unbelievable!"

"And best when not thought of," she answered quickly. "Yes, stay with me, Brian O'Hara. Stay with me for at least one year, fighting for me and obeying my every word implicitly."

Out from the night came the hum and murmur of the camp's inhabitants.

"It means continuous and wondrous adventure; strange lands and weird cities; a sunken world, the very existence of which no outside human has ever dreamed; perhaps an endowment from the very Tree of Life itself! Yes; stay with me for twelve months, and if at the end of that time you should wish to return to your own country, I promise it shall be with a treasure unequaled even in that great world of wealth!"

"And what would be expected of me?"

"You will remain here for the present. Tomorrow I ride to the south with a hundred followers, to arouse the desert tribes in the great attack that will mean the downfall of 'The Wolf,' but I have need of one here I can truly trust to guard the maid, Na-Ela."

"Na-Ela—the girl we found in the tomb?" I asked. "Then she too is a prisoner?"

"Ah, again you say that word," she laughed. "No; let us say that she too is my guest. And it is up to you therefore to guard her at all times, and see that she is visited by none but the two women I have allotted as her attendants. Five days hence, when the warriors move on to the west, you and the

girl will accompany them, where presently I shall join you by the lonely waters of the Enchanted Lake."

I will not attempt an excuse for my answering words, but will only venture the opinion that the mind of man is as fickle as the wind around him. When I had entered that silken structure five minutes earlier, it was with every intention of demanding an escort and guidance to the nearest civilized outpost; and now with scarcely three hundred seconds added to my age, I found myself deciding to enter the services of this fascinating creature and continue this wild life. Of course the promises of wealth and adventure may have been primary in my decision, as well as the urge to see and know the strange places of which she had spoken; but then again . . .

There followed a brief silence before she inquired that one word in her soft and musical voice:

"Well?"

I nodded a mute agreement to the beauteous face before me, and so it was that I became a follower of Cleopatra!

THE following dawn the Queen of Egypt and a hundred of her followers rode off into the sand-hills of the south, in the movement that was destined to bring about the defeat and ruin of Manuel De Costa, long known as the infamous 'Wolf' of the Sahara.

During the following four days the orders of my employer brought me in almost constant association with the dark-eyed girl we had found in the subterranean vault; though she made it plainly evident, even from the first, that my presence was one neither enjoyed nor wished for. The two women attendants were wrinkled and sullen old creatures, whose few words we could neither understand nor answer. Yet it did not prevent them from keeping sharp eyes upon us, and their looks were ever hostile.

But the girl, Na-Ela—one might as well have tried to hold conversation with the Sphinx. Seldom did she leave her tent, except to stand before its little entrance, watching in silent wonderment the white-robed figures that passed before her; and on those few occasions when I spoke in the Latin tongue we both knew, her answer was always that majestic, scornful glance.

I was beginning to believe that I would never be regarded as other than a nuisance, when the incident occurred that won me both her friendship and confidence.

Among the followers of the camp was a dark, burly brute I had never liked or trusted. On several occasions I had observed him eyeing the girl, and once he had sought to speak to her—a direct violation of the orders of his mistress. And then, late on the third night, loud screams brought me running to Na-Ela's tent to find her struggling in his arms. Her savage resistance had aroused him to fury. Two strong hands had grasped the slender throat of the girl, whose minutes would have been quickly numbered had I not come to her aid with several lusty blows and a well-placed kick that sent the man reeling into the night with howls of pain and terror.

I turned, to behold the girl looking at me in astonishment.

"Why did you do it?" she whispered. "Why did you save me from the ugly one?"

"What else was there for me to do?" I answered. "I could not see him harm you."

"But why should you wish to save me and harm him?" she insisted. "You are now one of them. Did not the great

Queen herself tell me just before leaving that you had become one of her followers, and therefore was my enemy?"

"I did agree to protect you during the absence of the Queen," I continued, "but why should that make me your enemy?"

"All those who serve Cleopatra are my enemies," she answered.

"But I do not want to be your enemy," I went on. "No matter what the others are, I do not want you to think of me as an enemy. Oh, I know the whole thing is a great mystery to both of us, perhaps, but I have been trying to tell you for the past three days that I want to help you, and am willing to prove it in any way you ask." I made the suggestion without the slightest thought that she would accede.

The girl stood looking at me for a long minute before she spoke.

"You are a strange man," she answered at length. "I hardly know what to say or think. I and my people have learned to expect only lies and treachery from the followers of the Queen, and yet I do want to be fair. Perhaps you are different. The Queen did say you came from a new world, and it may be that you speak the truth. Oh, I only hope it is so," she went on; "that I have really found a friend I can trust, to help me."

The cries of the beaten man without had attracted the attention of the two women from their own tent, and they were now hurrying to investigate.

"Sh!" cautioned the girl. "They must not hear us. Though unable to understand the Roman tongue, they are quick to surmise anything, and will be certain to report their suspicion to their mistress. Act as though I were but thanking you for saving me."

"But I must talk to you. I——"

"Tomorrow night when the camp is asleep," she whispered hastily, just as the excited party without burst in on us with a wild flow of words and gestures. "By the palm trees beyond the tents—wait for me. I will be there!"

11. A Tale of the Long Ago

THE following night I waited by the three palm trees in the desert a short distance beyond the encampment, for the mystery girl, Na-Ela.

All during that day the warriors had been making preparations for the march on the morrow. Horses were groomed, saddles and other equipment made ready, while the continuous laughter and carefree manner of the riders told plainly that both the journey and its destination were most welcome to them.

For my own part, the time passed quickly enough. There had been innumerable little duties to perform, though I was not exactly certain as to the journey's length, or its ultimate termination. The beast that had been given to me I carefully combed and curried, and inspected my own meager equipment and supplies. Of course I had not been unmindful of my most important duty, but it was evident that my rough handling of the intruder on the previous night had served its purpose. None approached the tent of the girl, other than the two women attendants, nor did I find a chance for any words with Na-Ela that day, though several times I managed to obtain a fleeting glimpse of her, and once her eyes met mine in a look of understanding.

And now I waited for her by the palm trees she had mentioned, while a short distance before me glowed the fires of the encampment. For an hour or more I must have kept my vigil before a shadow flitted through the

gloom, and the next instant Na-Ela was beside me, her heavy breathing betraying her haste.

"I thought they would never leave me—those two old women," were her first words. "Not till I had sought my cot and feigned a heavy slumber did they finally depart. I have a feeling that they suspect something, and were loath to leave me. Then again I knew you would be waiting, and feared you might think I had failed you and taken your own departure. I knew I must hasten; so scarcely had the two women entered their own quarters before I was lifting the back end of my tent and hurrying into the darkness."

"You had no need to worry about my leaving," I assured her, as we sat upon the clean sand beneath the palm trees. "I would have waited till dawn, or longer, if you wished it."

Around us whistled a cool night wind throwing the girl's wavy black hair into a lovely disorder. Out from the night would come the occasional wail of some desert jackal, or the call of a camp sentry.

High overhead the glorious Sahara stars seemed to have encompassed the sky.

"They are still the same," murmured the girl after a pause, her eyes raised to the desert night above her; "the stars, I mean, shining so distant, so cold and brilliant. The same aloofness as when I first beheld them on that long-gone night which saw my father's caravan begin its great journey to the hieroglyphic-carved halls of Cleopatra, two thousand years ago. I know my words may sound strange—perhaps you will believe them to be false," she continued, turning toward me with a smile. "But you have the promise of Na-Ela, man of the new world, that what she has spoken are words of truth."

"You—you lived two thousand years ago?" I asked.

"And slumbered through the ages in a silent, death-like stupor, till you and the great Queen awakened me to life."

"But our history," I protested; "it has taught us differently. How can she be Cleopatra? Not doubting your own words that you may have lived so long ago, history tells us that Cleopatra followed her lover, Anthony, in death. That the bite of an asp——"

"Would you like to know what really did happen in the tower of Isis Lochias on that far distant night?" she went on. "How the Queen of Egypt escaped not only death, but the disgrace of returning to Rome, a captive in chains? Of how the cunning Baltarus fooled not only the legions of Octavius, but also the countless generations that have since trod the earth during the slow passing of the centuries?"

I cannot recall my answer, but presently the girl was again speaking, and I listening to her story—a wild, fantastic tale indeed, of the distant long ago.

"MY NAME is, as you already know, Na-Ela," she began. "It was in the sunken city of Lothar, some two thousand years ago, that I first opened my eyes to that weird and watery world ruled by my father, Na-Harus the Just, beloved and last King of the lake people, the Tarkamites.

"Ours is the least known, though one of the oldest—if indeed, not the oldest—races of all mankind. In those distant days when the world was yet young, it is said that the Tarkamite race began with the great Tarka, who led his little band from the haunts of the first man to the wild and unknown countries in the west. Legend has it, also, that on the eve of the departure of that prehistoric tribe, their old leader stole into

the strange garden that had known man's creation, and with the aid of several others, carried off the tree whose fruit had caused the downfall of the First Parents.

"For many days, for many years, the tribe of Tarka moved westward, often halting their march for years at a time while they built their cities and cultivated their lands, yet ever forsaking their homes to continue the wandering of their ancestors. But by now the Tarkamites had grown to a powerful nation, far advanced in all arts and wisdom, and her sages were learned men who were able to see far into the future; so that when the great rains fell on the desolate land where they had built their mighty castle-city, my people were prepared and ready.

"Day by day the rains continued, till at last that vast desert had turned into a great sea, and all the world was drowned. But far down in their huge castle-city my people were safe, as their strong walls and buildings kept out the swirling water, and the great pumps that circulated the life-giving air worked day and night. In time the waters on the desert land receded, but always a great lake remained above the submerged city that had been built in a mighty canyon.

"In time my people forgot any world other than the beautiful one they had come to love at the bottom of the sea.

"And in that strange city of Lothar I was born, some fifty centuries after the great rains had flooded the world. My childhood was spent in learning the history and knowledge of my own, as well as that of other countries, so that my wisdom might be equal to the reign that was before me. In their glittering helimite helmets my people were able to rise to the surface of the great lake, as well as to penetrate the fields and jungles at its depths. Often they would send out small expeditions to distant lands, returning with the sages and warriors of other nations; though our captives were always treated kindly. Thus at the age of eighteen I was able to speak Egyptian, Latin, and the Parthian tongue, as well as my own.

"The great secret of the Tarkamite race was the hidden spot where the Tree of Life had been planted ages earlier. Only her kings had a knowledge of its whereabouts, and this in turn was told to the succeeding rulers down through the centuries. And then came the day I was summoned to the great throne room of my father, where, alone, my kindly sire caressed me and spoke in his softest tone, for I was the only heir to his ancient throne and treasures.

" 'Many strange stories are being brought to us from the east, my daughter; stories of war and conquest that would go better unsaid. Here, safe in the depths of our own submerged city, we could go on forever without the aid of the outside world; but even then, through the clearness of our protecting lake, come the whispers that far beyond its watery outposts the powers of old Egypt, as well as the other countries of the ancient world, are toppling before the swords of a government scarce five centuries old—Rome!

" 'And that can mean but one thing, my child.' Na-Harus, my father and the last King of the Tarkamites, stroked my head thoughtfully. 'The clanking legions of the Cæsars will shortly be appearing in every part of the world—grim, relentless, the conquerors!'

" 'But our own people, my father—are we not safe here in our hidden city?'

"And Na-Harus answered: 'Quite safe, Na-Ela; quite safe indeed are the Tarkamites from the powers of Rome.

And that is why I have this day summoned you that you may learn that which has been known only to rulers of our race throughout the ages, for tomorrow I leave to find the Queen of Egypt and offer her the protection of our hidden city, and with the dangers and death abroad on the world above our waves it is possible I may not return to the cool halls of my homeland.'

"Then, bending low above me, Na-Harus, last King of the Tarkamites, whispered the location of the hidden Tree of Life.

"Soon after that my father's caravan began its great journey to distant Egypt, but my constant pleadings had at last prevailed upon the kindly man, and I was allowed to accompany him. Together with his offer of a haven to the Queen, Na-Harus brought a small yellow apple from the Tree of Life. Of course no true Tarkamite would have dared to eat the wondrous fruit whose sweetness was said to endow two thousand years of youth, less thirty-six —for so great a span of life was forbidden by our ancestors—but my father felt that Egypt's Queen would both wish for and appreciate its powers.

"Days upon days we continued over the endless sands but my father's caravan was never to know the city of Alexandria. With our journey all but completed we were attacked by a wild tribe of desert savages, and the great Na-Harus and all his warriors slain, except a score or so of the stoutest fighters.

"Indeed, it is likely we would have all perished were it not for the timely arrival of a troop of Egyptian soldiers who had been sent out to welcome us; for the messengers of my father had reached the court of the Queen, foretelling our coming.

"It was the soldiers of Egypt who escorted me the rest of the journey, and quartered both myself and the remaining Tarkamite warriors in a great house at the outskirts of Alexandria. There, though our coming had been kept a secret from the populace, I was treated in the manner becoming my station, for since the death of my father I had become Queen and sole ruler of the Tarkamite nation.

"But the short hours of my reign were rapidly drawing to a close. The following night there came to me the great Baltarus, ancient wise man and secret adviser of the Queen of Egypt, who had been sent to escort me to her —Baltarus adding that I bring only one follower so that we might proceed in an inconspicuous manner; for by now the city had fallen to the legions, and Roman soldiers swarmed in the streets.

"I chose as my follower the giant warrior who had been my father's guard. A swift look passed between him and Baltarus, though it was not till some time later that I was able to appreciate its meaning. Through the streets of Alexandria we three hurried. I was heavily cloaked, and carried beneath the folds the small casket that held the tiny apple from the Tree of Life.

"At the doorway of the tower of Isis Lochias, the Roman sentries on duty looked nervously around them, then quickly ushered us within; for they had been heavily bribed. Up a winding stairway we hurried, and a moment later I entered the room where waited the captured Cleopatra. A little apart from her the two women attendants, Iras and Charmian, watched me in a wide-eyed silence.

"EGYPT's beauteous Queen spoke almost immediately:

" 'The Daughter of Na-Harus, the

Tarkamite, has journeyed far to find Cleopatra,' she began, a slightly puzzled expression on her exotic features, 'and arrives but to find her a captive of the Roman, Octavius. Yet even in this hour of despair I welcome you, though I know not the reason of your coming.'

" 'To carry out the last wishes of my father, oh Queen,' I answered. 'To save, if possible, the last of the Ptolemaic rulers. The hidden city of my ancestors is a far and distant one, and in the great depths of its halls the Queen of Egypt would indeed be safe from the legions of Rome.'

" 'And there is still time if we hasten, royal Egypt,' broke in Baltarus, 'still time for speedy horses to carry you miles beyond Alexandria before your flight would be discovered.'

" 'Time to escape?' she asked.

" 'If we hasten—yes, oh Queen. The guards below have been heavily bribed, and will be blind to our departure, but at any moment may come a change of sentries, and that would be ruinous.'

" 'Yes, fly! Fly!' cried the women attendants.

" 'Better flight than a captive to Rome,' added Baltarus.

" 'Better to die a Queen than to live without such dignity.' Cleopatra flashed a glare at her adviser.

" 'The lion flees when outnumbered, your Majesty,' came his ready answer. 'Even the great Thothmes has been known to retreat from a superior force —an act of wisdom that would later bring him victory. If you should escape this night, royal Egypt, who knows but that one day Cleopatra may again mount her throne in triumph?'

" 'And if I were to leave this tower, Baltarus?'

" 'Beyond the north gate a ready chariot and fast horses are waiting.'

"For a long moment she hesitated while the others pleaded with her, and then in the flickering torchlight I watched the Queen of Egypt prepare for flight.

" 'My cloak, Iras,' she commanded hurriedly. 'Haste! A long, heavy cloak that will hide my features from the idlers in the streets. Charmian, my jewel casket. I will take a few of my most valued treasures with me, though the bulk of them I must leave behind. Yes, Daughter of Na-Harus,' she spoke to me, 'I will accept your kindly offer, and seek refuge in your distant city. Know you also, that if I ever regain my throne you have earned the gratitude of Cleopatra.'

"For a few minutes her two attendants moved hurriedly. The Queen of Egypt was all but ready when the voice of Baltarus purred softly:

" 'Tarry but a moment, royal Egypt. The Daughter of Na-Harus has as yet made no mention of the great gift her father brought with him from his sunken world.'

"It was Baltarus who then told of the fruit from the Tree of Life that I carried inside my cloak, as well as its strange powers. Cleopatra was skeptical.

" 'Why then,' she asked, 'do not the Tarkamites eat of the fruit of this tree, if indeed its powers be what you claim? Surely they too would wish the great life of perpetual youth you say it endows.'

"It was some time before the wise Baltarus could convince her that the fruit was indeed all he claimed. He mentioned he had read of it on ancient clay tablets. When the Queen demanded to know the whereabouts of the tree, as well as the apple I held, I refused to tell her. It was then that my giant guard showed his treachery.

" 'She knows, great Queen!' he cried,

and I realized the gold of Baltarus had bought his loyalty. 'Na-Ela, alone of all humans, knows the location of the Tree of Life. It is the secret of our royal ones, and Na-Harus has whispered its whereabouts to his daughter. If you——'

"It was the sudden sound of footsteps below that silenced him—a loud tramping we knew to be that of marching men. Now it stopped directly at the base of the tower, and harsh commands rang out in the darkness, while we six in the room above stood as wide-eyed statues. Then again the tramping was renewed, to grow fainter as it retreated in the distance.

"It was the treacherous guard who first realized its significance.

" 'They have changed the guard!' he gasped, a wild terror leaping to his face. 'O God of the Elders, they have changed the guard! Then—then we are doomed! Soon the great Octavius will come and find us here!' His voice rose to a shrill scream. 'It means torture!'

"In an instant all was confusion in that little tower room. The treacherous guard fairly groveled on the floor in an agony of fear. Iras ran about with little sobs of terror. Charmian cried and wrung her hands. Even the great Queen herself stood uncertain, her eyes flashing around her, and one hand clutching at her cloak.

"Only Baltarus had remained calm, and now he suddenly wheeled from the window where he had been watching the guards below.

" 'Nay!' he cried. 'It does not mean torture. The Queen of Egypt leaves the tower of Isis Lochias this night. True, hostile soldiers guard the door at the foot of the stairway, but with the smile of the gods to aid us we shall not fail.'

" 'Cease your meaningless muttering, dotard!' snapped Cleopatra. 'What is it you would tell us?'

"Baltarus stepped slowly toward her.

" 'Let us say that something should happen to suddenly draw the attention of the guards below to this very room,' he continued softly, his eyes narrowing to mere slits. 'There is a tiny niche behind the stairway where one could hide till they passed, then slip out, unnoticed, to the streets beyond. Of course it would necessitate some startling announcement to gain their entire attention. But if I were to rush out crying that the Queen of Egypt had taken her own life——'

"He paused before he added: 'Then Cleopatra might indeed gain the chariot that is waiting for her.'

"As Baltarus ceased speaking, all eyes were turned upon him.

"It was the Queen who broke the tense silence.

" 'But the soldiers—they would be quick to discover my absence.'

" 'Not if one lay on yon golden couch who indeed resembled death, one whom my skilled hands could soon disguise in such a manner that none short of the great Antony himself would recognize her for other than the Queen.'

" 'One to die while I escape? But who, Baltarus? Both Iras and Charmian are well known.'

" 'True, royal Egypt, true,' he answered. 'Both Iras and Charmian are too well known to aid us in this great hoax, too familiar to the eyes of the Roman soldiery to hope to pass for the last Ptolemaic ruler. But not so of another, oh Queen!' he cried. 'Not so of yon Tarkamite who has this night come to you!'

"Baltarus the Egyptian wheeled as his right hand flew to the knife at his belt.

" 'Na-Ela must die that Cleopatra may live!'

"And as he spoke the words the royal adviser stepped toward me!"

12. The Enchanted Lake

HERE the slender Tarkamite Princess paused in her story. During the while she had voiced it I was oblivious to both time and my surroundings. Out from the night had come the wail and cry of the desert's prowling creatures, and the murmur of its winds. High overhead the gleaming stars still flashed and sparkled, but for me there had been naught, other than that fascinating tale and the sweet face of its narrator.

"But I was not to know death," Na-Ela added. "No; the gods had ordained that the hand of Baltarus should be halted. Even as his knife was drawn, Cleopatra cried the command that stopped him."

The girl turned toward me with a smile.

"What followed was far more terrifying than death could ever hope to be, though the passing of two thousand years has somewhat dimmed its memory. I recall Baltarus telling of the great elixir he had discovered that could be plunged into my veins and render me immune to time, in a silent, death-like coma, and the counteracting serum that would awaken me when I might again be needed. Of how he would disguise my features in such a manner that I might be taken for Cleopatra, and then raise the cry that the Queen had taken her life by the asp that had indeed been smuggled into the chamber for that very purpose.

"I remember, also, the willingness of Iras and Charmian to end their own lives that it might further add to the realism of the great subterfuge; of Cleopatra eating the tiny apple from the Tree of Life while the others watched in silence; of the voluntary suicide of Charmian and Iras, and then of the slow advancing of Baltarus to where I stood, helpless, in the strong grasp of the treacherous guard—the tiny needle that held the great elixir flashing in the torchlight.

"There was a slight twinge as its sharp point sank deep into my arm, an instant of unbelievable coldness, and then the black clouds came forward to engulf me in that slumber of the ages.

"Yes, I recall all that, although it happened nearly twenty centuries ago. But it was not till four nights past that the Queen told me of how the cunning of Baltarus had indeed deceived the Romans, while she remained in hiding at a small inn on the outskirts of Alexandria. Cleopatra mentioned also how the artful Baltarus, as acting physician for the Queen, had deftly transferred my unconscious form from the great casket sent to him, to a much smaller one, and in the dead of night had lowered it to a waiting band of Egyptian soldiers; so that when the sarcophagus, supposed to contain the embalmed body of Cleopatra, was taken to the vault, its interior held only the hard-packed sand of the desert.

"The captain of the Egyptian soldiers, Kharmes by name, had been ordered to take the casket far from Egypt and the known countries, lest the Romans, finding it, should come to realize that they had been tricked. For long Cleopatra and Baltarus waited at the inn, but Kharmes never returned to tell where he had hidden the casket, so that at last the Queen of Egypt was forced to proceed to the sunken city of Lothar, where eventually she became its sole ruler."

"But during those many years," I

asked, "why did Cleopatra not try to retake her throne?"

"I do not know," the girl admitted. "When she talked to me the Queen was most secretive as to her actions during the centuries, though quite willing to speak of the years she had spent in searching for me, as well as to ask repeatedly the whereabouts of the Tree of Life."

"And—and you told her?" I ventured, hardly knowing whether to smile or be serious.

"Nay, I did not tell her—I never shall. The location of the Tree of Life is a secret known only to my ancestors, and handed down through the ages. It is the pledge of our blood that it can be told to none other, and to break the promise I made to my father on that long-gone day would brand me as one unworthy of such a sire. But I did not mention this to the Queen. I feigned weakness, saying that I was unable to remember anything for the present, as my mind was still hazy from the effects of the drug, and it might be several days before it returned to normal.

"So the Queen had to be content with that," she concluded, "though it was evident that this delay was not at all to her liking."

"And of all humans you alone know the hidden valley where stands the Tree of Life?"

Even as the girl nodded, I asked that other question.

"But why should the Queen be so eager to find it?" I inquired.

Na-Ela the Tarkamite rose to her lovely height. The hour was now well past midnight, time we both sought our respective cots, for the journey on the morrow would be a tiring one. I had quietly followed her example and risen to my feet when the girl spoke again:

"Because in another thirty days the time limit of the fruit will have ended. Because, ere another moon has gone, two thousand years, less thirty-six, will have passed."

She paused, then added slowly:

"Because, if by that time she has not again eaten from the Tree of Life, Cleopatra knows she will crumble to the dust that should have claimed her centuries ago!"

THAT was the story told me by the girl, Na-Ela, beneath the palm trees. I do not say the tale is true, nor will I attempt to prove its authenticity; rather, I would let the reader draw his own conclusions when he has read of what I was to see and hear in the sunken city of Lothar.

Early the next morning the white-robed riders began the journey southward. For days we rode, passing a small mountain range, across a low divide, traversing numerous level sweeps of sand that stretched for miles, and encountering a desert storm. Several times we saw the wretched encampments of the primitive Beri-Beri men, but never were we able to catch a glimpse of those black bowmen, though twice still-smoking campfires told the nearness of their presence.

Late on the afternoon of the ninth day we came to the silent shores of a large lake, a weirdly beautiful and sky-blue lake that shone like a giant azure disk in the waning sunlight, a good ten miles in circumference. A half-mile from the shore a tiny isle appeared as little more than a sand mound, while perhaps twice that far again rose the high, cliff-sided outlines of a much larger island, its barren, rocky peaks rising in jagged, fantastic shapes to the sky.

This then was the Enchanted Lake of which I had heard so much, that

strange watery body Na-Ela had said was the home of her ancestors for fifty centuries, the long-forgotten, unknown lake, that even today hides its terrible secret in its blue depths, deep in the heart of the great Sahara.

Early that morning, in halting, broken French, one of the riders had told that both the girl and I would be left here to await the coming of his mistress, nor did the actions of the warriors now prove contrary to his words. Scarcely had we reached the shores when the gestures of the leading horsemen told that we were to dismount, as did one of their own number. Then, with our riderless horses following in their wake, the entire company set off at a rapid gallop toward the west.

Standing on a tiny hillock I watched till the last rider had vanished over the horizon, still the same mysterious horde as when I had first seen them. It was not till some time later that I learned their surprising origin, or the swift means of communication between them and the beauteous woman they served. Indeed, it was these same riders who were destined to bring around my own capture, and hasten the strange finis of this story.

I turned to behold the remaining rider sitting on a sand dune in stolid silence, his hands toying with the tiny lantern they held, while near-by, at the water's edge, Na-Ela stood looking over the silent blueness that rolled and sparkled in the sunset.

"It is indeed the blue lake," she spoke softly as I joined her, "the same blue lake in whose cool depths I first opened my eyes so long ago; the clear and lovely waters that for over seven thousand years have hidden the forgotten city of Lothar.

"That island," and she pointed to the little spot that was scarcely more than a sand-bar with a solitary palm tree—"it is from there that we will descend to the white plains of Tarka. Only once have I traversed it, but the memory of that winding pathway and the finny things along its border is still familiar."

"And that?" I asked, pointing to the large, cliff-sided isle that rose in the distance.

The girl shuddered, then turned to me with wide and frightened eyes.

"It is the Island of Death!" she whispered in a tone so low as to be almost inaudible, nor would she vouchsafe any further information. Plainly, I had touched upon a frightening and forbidden subject.

The sun sank lower and lower into the west, and finally disappeared, but still we waited. The purple shades of evening were rapidly changing to the darker hues of night when a solitary rider appeared in the gloom, hurrying a foam-bespeckled horse toward us at a fast gallop. A moment later and the beast had been drawn in to a sharp stop as its rider swung from the saddle—a tall and shapely feminine figure in riding-breeches and an open-necked white shirt, whose wavy black hair was protected by a brown and travel-stained cork helmet.

The beauteous rider spoke a few words to the warrior, who handed her the lamp he had lighted, and then sprang into the saddle and urged the tired horse into the gloom, before her eyes were turned toward us.

"Again we are together," she greeted. "Ah, the smile of Osiris has indeed been upon us. Another hour should find us safe in the cool halls of old Lothar, and far from the heat and treachery of the desert.

"Even as we are safe from Manuel

De Costa," she added with her musical laugh. "The stronghold of 'The Wolf' has at last been taken. No longer will the Spanish renegade and his followers prey upon me, or slay and rob the plodding caravans. The united tribes of the south attacked and captured the mountain city, and though he and a handful of his raiders managed to escape, the power of Manuel De Costa is broken forever."

As she spoke, the last of the Ptolemaic rulers walked to the water's edge, and peered into the darkness. Now she raised the lighted lantern before her, and began to swing it slowly back and forth as though signaling to someone in the blackness beyond. For several minutes she continued, pausing occasionally as though waiting for some response, when an answering golden twinkle suddenly shone out in the darkness ahead.

The royal Egyptian had lowered her light and was staring into the blackness. Na-Ela and I were but a pace behind her, waiting. Presently a faint splashing sounded in the distance, and an instant later came the squeak of an oarlock. The Queen of Egypt turned toward us.

"And now you will be taken to a land of wonders, Brian O'Hara, an ancient and watery land that has been the home of the Tarkamite race since the deluge. No outsider has seen its plains and jungles for twenty centuries. No outsider knows the secrets of the Enchanted Lake or of forgotten Lothar that lies upon its bottom. And yet it is to the submerged halls of that great city that we now go—a half-mile below the surface!"

HERE I would pause briefly. As the reader may have guessed by now, I am no scientist, nor do I lay claim to any such title. However, it did not take a man of any great learning to realize that (according to the experience of divers and the countless writings of scientists) a descent to such a depth was next to an impossibility. It has been pointed out that even at three hundred feet below the surface the water pressure is well on to a hundred and fifty pounds to the square inch. At a half-mile, I reasoned, it could not be much less than a ton to the square inch. Then again, what of the terrible blackness that must prevail at twenty-seven hundred feet below the surface?

My reflections were interrupted by the small boat suddenly appearing from the darkness, and the strange figure that manned it.

It was a tall, dark-skinned man that rowed the little craft—one who, as the boat's bottom grated upon the pebbles of the beach, sprang over its side and advanced toward us. At that first glimpse of him I thought that he was clothed in only the loin-cloth, the strange turban and soft sandals that were visible in the dim light of the lantern. It was not till he had come closer that I noticed the transparent covering that enveloped his head and body to the waist, while his arms and legs were free. So translucent was his strange raiment that at first I had not noticed it.

Like a glittering cylinder of crystal it showed, a clear, transparent armor from which his arms protruded, and ending at the elastic band encircling his waist, through which no water could penetrate. Strapped to his back were two black, oblong boxes. I was soon to learn that these contained the oxygen that sustained life below the waves—one being the producer of air, while its mate was an absorber of the waste matter.

Of course no sound could reach him

through that weird and glittering envelope, but luckily, for the time at least, words were scarcely needed. Together with the man we three entered the boat; then at a gesture from the Royal One, the newcomer once more took his station at the oars.

The journey was brief. Our little craft danced over the waves with the cool waters gurgling in its wake. Swiftly the small boat cut through the blackness, and presently we had drawn up to the sands of the tiny isle before us.

"It is the uppermost peak of a high mountain that rises above what once was a great canyon," explained our leader, "and at its far side is the tiny pathway that will lead us to the ooze-covered plain at its base. For centuries it has been the sole means of communication with the outside world. I myself have traversed it thousands of times, and its rocky trail might well have known the tread of men at the dawn of history."

Here waited another, a much older and stouter man, who wore the same transparent armor as the first. That our coming was expected was evident by the three glass-like suits that lay near-by. Quickly the boat was pulled high on the sand beside the solitary palm tree, and a moment later the two men were helping Na-Ela and me into the glittering equipment, after having first assisted their Queen into her own with an ease and skill that told of long practise.

Within their clear interiors we breathed with perfect ease. Then the two black boxes were adjusted to our shoulders, and the journey to the sunken city had begun.

At the far end of the tiny isle—a matter of a dozen steps or so—a narrow and well-worn pathway led downward to the water. To this we were conducted, and with the younger of the two men leading the way, our little party of five entered the water to follow the downward course of the rocky trail. Higher rose the water, to our waists and then our shoulders, but there was no hesitancy on the part of the Queen who walked before me, or of any of the others who composed that tiny group.

And so, though I had the feeling of a suicide as I did it, I followed on behind the steps of Cleopatra, and the next instant the waters of the Enchanted Lake had closed over my head.

You will not want to miss the next installment of this strange story, in which "The Wolf" strikes again. We suggest that you reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

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The high priest's face bent lower. Dark eyes looked into her own. A faint urgent whisper reached her ears. "I have come . . . from Hell . . . to you. Hold me! Save me!"

The Sin-Eater

By G. G. PENDARVES

An unusually strange and powerful tale of possession and dual personality, by the author of "Thing of Darkness" and other gripping stories

LOOK about you! What do you think of this land where the dark experiment we shall watch takes place? This ancient haunted land of Cornwall—unfertile, unfriendly, isolated until last century from the world, even from the rest of England. Old gods, old worships, old forgotten races have died hard and lingeringly in this narrow peninsula. Cromlechs, shrines and ruined altars on many lonely hills and desolate moors still remain to remind, to suggest, with dark portents of evil.

Not long ago Black Magic darkened the thoughts and lives of men here, from Land's End to King Arthur's Seat; not long enough to purge

the duchy of its evil, not long enough to drive out forces so long dominant.

Apparently — oh yes — apparently only legends remain: legends useful to amuse summer visitors in company with wishing-wells, smugglers' caves, bathing-beaches, old coastguard paths, Roman forts, ancient tin mines, pilchards and clotted cream. Let it go at that. Legends!

In reality this is the story of a master scientist who dealt with human powers which few of us begin to understand. And it is always comfortable to deny the existence of what we don't understand. We demand of science improvement, discovery, bigger and better toys to play with in order that we can more easily forget the briefness of our stay in the playground itself. The science we support is obvious, spectacular, dealing only with matter, dealing with our bodies very specially that they may be bigger, better bodies so that we may stay longer to play with our toys.

But the mind of man! How convenient to forget the sciences that concern the mind of man! The majority

have a touching faith in modern psychology as being a complete map to it. About as comprehensive and true a map as those of the world made in the Twelfth Century!

That's as it may be, but most readers will grant, however, the suitability of our background here in Cornwall for this, for almost any imaginable mystery. Look at the broken, towering, gloomy cliffs. They guard memories of bloodshed, violence and tragedy, of wild gales and greedy seas, of battered ships and drowning men, of wreckers more barbaric than Moorish pirates, of smugglers and press-gangs, of long centuries of struggle between man and his enemy, the sea. On this wild coast the breaking tides boom one continuous knell—death!

And inland? Do these bare moors, this stern gray granite give you comfort?

Look closer—closer—at this old fishing-port. It is full of narrow cobbled ways, full of dark-skinned, dark-eyed fishermen, their swarming children, their hundreds of cats.

This is the port of Trink. This is where we shall watch a great experiment.

We reach the great iron gates of Lamorna House—follow a shadowed drive between tall firs that moan and whisper the sea's long dirge—death! death! death!

MARK ZENNOR was dying.

He lay in his great carven bed and watched the pair of lovers with hard, merciless eyes. His young wife, Rosaina, and Stephen Lynn, his nephew, secretary and——? What else Stephen was, or would shortly be, was hidden in the dying man's thoughts.

Dying! It seemed impossible to Rosaina. She knew the doctors had given him up, said the patient was hanging on hour by hour by a miracle of will-power. She knew her husband had repeatedly affirmed this. But he seemed to her more awfully alive than ever.

"Death, where is thy sting?
Where grave, thy victory?"

The words flashed across her confused and terrified thoughts. Hysteria threatened. How ironical, those words, in connection with a death-bed like this! She bit her lip, closed her smarting eyes. Mark's voice stabbed her to control again. Her eyes opened to meet his sharp, cruel stare.

"Permit me to offer my sympathy. This is a most difficult rôle for you, my dear. Unpardonable of me to subject you to such embarrassment. It should have been so simple, so congenial a task to speed a parting guest. And an inconvenient husband at that! But *my* exit from this world? You feel something is lacking, eh? Now why?—why, Rosaina?"

Why indeed? For the life of her she couldn't formulate her deep uneasiness. Mark really was dying, there could be no question of it; all the doctors and specialists had agreed on that. A great many doctors had come and gone during the week of Mark's illness.

"It's only fair to you and Stephen that I take my departure with a good deal of publicity," he had explained. "My illness is so sudden and so unexpected that rumors might arise as to whether you two had connived at it. With all the drugs I use in my body a post-mortem would be very unconvincing."

It was remarks like this that stuck in Rosaina's mind. And the flicker of laughter in his eyes as he'd said them. At this very moment he——

"You're a fool, Rosaina, but not

quite such a fool as Stephen. You at least realize how little you understand my work—my art. And you are afraid. Most wise. My nephew, on the other hand——"

He turned his great head, massive and bold in outline as the carved figure-head of a ship. His dark-red hair, tonsured like a monk's, was untouched by gray in spite of his eighty years. Under a tremendous brow, his eyes glittered like quartz in strong sunlight. His nose was long, finely cut, extremely sensitive, and, in conjunction with deeply-sunken cheeks and the fine brow, would have stamped him as an intellectual and ascetic had it not been for the mouth. That was a horror, a great bar of ugly crimson across the colorless face.

Stephen Lynn did not meet his uncle's keen, stabbing glance. He sat in the glow of a cavernous red fire across the room, and though ill at ease and resentful of his uncle's characteristically unpleasant way of conducting his death-bed scene Stephen's clever, mobile face showed neither fear nor doubt.

"My nephew," pursued Mark, "is too much a man of the world, of *this* world, to share your misgivings as to the future, Rosaina.

"Imperial Caesar, dead, and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

"My widow and her wealth would stop a good-sized hole. Exactly!"

A stain of color showed in the young man's face, too pale and sharply drawn for his age and build. But Stephen was a young man of character and ambition. His uncle paid him handsomely. He'd found the resources of Lamorna library invaluable for his own private researches. And there was always Rosaina. The fact of her near and dear presence had made his difficult, often revolting work possible.

He made no reply in speech, but Mark Zennor saw the red blood in his cheeks and sniggered.

"Don't trouble to conceal your face, my boy. And your thoughts are perfectly correct, too. I *am* almost finished, so it's hardly worth while your taking me seriously now. I shall die before midnight."

STEPHEN frowned at the floor between his knees. He'd never got accustomed to his uncle's hateful trick of snatching the thoughts from his brain and putting them into words. He glanced across at Rosaina sitting on the far side of the great curtained bed. How nervous and strained she looked! He'd be thankful when the end came and he could take her away.

"After all, Stephen," the voice from the bed proceeded, "you owe me a good deal. You've done better for yourself here than would have been possible elsewhere. The laboratory I fitted up for your exclusive use. The lines of research I indicated. Your salary. And the beautiful widow I am so obligingly going to leave for you. All these things must be balanced against less congenial aspects of your work under my roof. In fact, I'm hoping you will not grudge a last small service—a mere trifle, I assure you."

Rosaina turned her head sharply. She recognized the note in Mark's voice with a pang of fear. He was going to ask Stephen something important—something of such importance that he thought it worth while to subdue possible opposition with a weapon that never failed him. Her own heart leaped, her pulses thrilled in response to it. Mark's

voice! Against all instinct and reason, those who heard *that* note in Mark's voice had no choice but to obey.

"Don't be anxious, my beautiful Rosaina. Indeed, my child, you must not be too sad, too tragic. I assure you there is hope, there is indeed hope!"

She shivered. Hope! What did he mean by that taunt? He knew his death was the one hope she had. He knew how she loathed and feared him, how she had tried to escape. But he would not let her go. And what Mark Zennor wanted he accomplished by methods peculiar to himself. She shivered again at memory of how, in the early days of her marriage, she had tried to run away. Mark had got her back in three days by means of a dream which haunted her during her absence. A very vile little dream, if indeed that whispering obscenity which never left her day or night could be called a dream. Possibly Mark might have used a more accurate term in describing the messenger he'd sent to bring back the runaway.

"Yes, hope! You were thinking on the right lines just now, my Rosaina, when your mind ran on death. I do indeed propose to rob it of its sting. And Stephen shall help me. I leave nothing to chance, to faith. I don't live by faith—that last resort of the inferior mind. I prove everything. I *have* proved everything—everything in this extremely elementary world of ours."

"Proved everything!"

Stephen echoed the words. For a moment he actually believed the monstrous assertion. His own mind seemed to shrink and shrivel, confronted by a knowledge and intelligence brilliant as the noontide sun.

Then he was himself again, but shaken, a trifle fallen in his own esteem until he remembered a reason for his peculiar and absurd emotion. Watching by a dying man was not conducive to perfect functioning of the nerves, more especially when the dying man was his Uncle Mark. He rallied himself and smiled at Rosaina. She mustn't guess how close he'd been to sharing her own superstitious fear of this megalomaniac.

"It reassures me, Stephen, to see you smile."

Rosaina shuddered at the mad laughter in her husband's eyes.

"You appreciate this death-bed business for what it's worth, a convincing bluff for the ignorant. Objective facts of the most elementary kind are all this so-called scientific age understands. The real experiments are concerned with the spirit—with the *will*."

Will! At that ominous word Rosaina felt her blood run cold under the costly gold brocade of her gown. Mark insisted always on golden rich materials to set off her honey-gold hair and the matt pallor of her skin. The great emerald, emblem of their marriage, flashed wickedly with each nervous contraction of her hands.

"I am the only man in Europe who needs no faith. I have knowledge. I have mastered the secrets of existence."

Stephen felt completely himself now. Had it not been for Rosaina's obvious apprehensions he'd have started an argument.

"I must say I envy you," he replied. "It must be a wonderful sensation for you!"

"Sensation!"

Zennor's resonant voice gave the word an extraordinary inflection. It expressed all the mad unfathomable derision that danced in the speaker's eyes. He opened a small platinum box, took out a pellet and swallowed it.

"A drug to give that keen edge to my intellect which I find necessary in dealing with you, nephew. I am too much diverted. And I have not much longer now. My—arrangements need scrupulously exact timing. The forces I control are as implacable as they are powerful."

The younger man frowned. He'd not realized quite how mad Rosaina's husband was. He looked at her again with startled apprehension. Good heavens! Was this the sort of thing she'd had to endure? No wonder she'd talked to him so wildly. There really was something in the old devil's voice—in his eyes—something inimical he'd never felt before. What a strong horrible face his uncle had! Curious this was the first time it had seemed malevolent and spiteful. In dying, though, no doubt the face-muscles contracted. Or perhaps the shadow that lay across the bed——

He got up in some haste, stirred the fire to a blaze, threw on a log, turned up a lamp. The shadow over the bed inexplicably remained.

"It's the shadow of death, my boy! Must do the thing properly." Zennor's eyes shone incandescent as a cat's as the fire roared up the chimney. "I promised both of you I'd die within the hour, and I'll keep my word. Death. Funeral. Burial. My mortal body committed to the earth. You two can carry out the whole heathenish sequence in most irreproachable style."

ROSAINA sprang to her feet. Her panic found speech.

"Tell us, tell us quickly what you mean? What is this new trick?—this game you're playing with us?"

Zennor regarded her convulsed features with deep interest.

"You ought to have gone on the stage. Absolutely born for tragic rôles! That was perfect! Perfect! I'm grateful for a moment of pure pleasure, Rosaina. It hadn't occurred to me you'd ever give me one again. I never saw you so thrillingly, vitally alive. Beauty! Passion! Exaltation! If a woman hasn't these she's a poor drab nuisance in the world."

Her tortured eyes looked across the bed to Stephen. He was standing by the fireplace. Irritation and some bewilderment showed on his thin tired face now. He didn't understand the awful fear that made Rosaina's face a Greek mask of horror. He didn't understand the crepitation of his own nerves. He didn't understand why his uncle, whom he'd always regarded as a man of brilliant intellect most grossly misapplied and therefore faintly contemptible, should now be inexplicably dominating, even portentous.

The vast shadowy room was very still for a spellbound minute. Huge black candles burned in wooden standards four feet high and stood in a wide semicircle at the foot of the bed. Their wax gave off a faint scent of ambergris. Three uncurtained windows showed a staring moon and hard bright stars in a sky like polished gleaming steel. Rising wind made the dark firs toss and moan about the house. A dog's long dreary howl rose.

"Stephen!"

Rosaina's voice was like the clash of cymbals.

"Stephen! Take care — ah, take care! There is danger! Mark is not dying—not dying, I tell you! It's a trap for you, my darling. Stephen! *Stephen!*"

Zennor's big smooth supple hands flickered in a movement so swift that Stephen couldn't then, or afterward, recall exactly what he thought he saw,

whether from the deepening pall of darkness over the bed a wing fluttered, a claw-like hand leaped forth, or if . . . if it was merely an effect of smoke and flame drawn with sudden swift roar up the great chimney.

Rosaina's hands flew to her throat. She gave a choking cry and fell back in her chair. Zennor's steely gaze turned from her to Stephen.

"Hysteria. I shall be dead in another fifteen minutes in spite of her unwarrantable lack of faith in my promise. You will spare fifteen minutes to hear a dying man's request?"

The cool convincing musical voice checked Stephen. Rosaina was overwrought. She'd had the devil of a time. But now—well, it was only decent to humor his uncle in his last moments.

"If there's anything special, Uncle Mark, anything I can do for you, of course I'll be glad to carry out instructions."

His eyes sought Rosaina. She looked a great deal more like dying than did the man on the bed. Rigid as if bound to her chair, her face, her eyes, her straining throat, every line of her body showed terror bordering on madness.

"She will recover. I shall not."

The words came from the shadow slowly, solemnly. They riveted Stephen's whole attention.

"I am listening, Uncle Mark."

"Then it is soon told. *I wish you to be my sin-eater.*"

The fantastic words meant nothing to the listener. He waited. Mark Zennor's brilliant eyes were turned toward an hourglass set in an alcove near by. Filled with blood-red sand, it was swung between supports formed by two nude figures of transparent amber glass. The thing was of exquisite workmanship wrought by a craftsman whose skill was only equaled by his obscenity.

"The last sands are running out, the last minutes of my life. Soon the glass will turn over. In the moment of its turning I intend to make the change you call death. I have planned this ever since you came here, nephew. It is no question of my eighty years, of failing powers. My brain and body are not affected by time. I learned the small secret of prolonging the life of the body here centuries ago. Oh, it was easy to produce symptoms for the doctors if you're remembering their babble! Sant's the only man who'd have guessed."

His fingers crisped in angry recollection.

"Sant! The only man who might—"

He glanced again at the hourglass and checked himself.

"I have work that can't be completed on this plane of existence. I am hampered by my body, restricted by its laws. So I shall die."

He caught and held his nephew's eye.

"I ask you only to keep vigil for one hour by my body when I am dead. And then to eat bread, to drink water, and repeat the few words written on this parchment."

He showed a small scroll tied with black tape and sealed. Stephen glanced at the still figure of Rosaina. How ill and queer she looked! It was difficult to think of anything else. His uncle's thick lips twitched in savage amusement.

"She hears and sees you very well. But she is—er—prevented from joining this last intimate talk between us."

"You've—you've hypnotized her!"

Stephen dashed across the room, took the girl's cold stiff hands, called her name. His frantic efforts might as well have been addressed to the chair on which she sat. He swung back to

the mocking, mountainous figure on the bed.

"What have you done to her? You old devil! I'll go and call——"

"No!"

Stephen was held in a vise. He could neither speak nor move.

"Unless you swear to obey me, swear to be my sin-eater, Rosaina shall never wake. She shall die in trance as she is now. I can rely on Those who serve me to see to it after I am gone. You can't help her any more than you can help yourself now."

Furiously aware of sudden utter helplessness, Stephen heard Mark Zennor's voice. Its deep organ-note filled the room; its terrible music bound his soul in chains.

"Swear, Stephen Lynn! Come close. Put your hand in mine and swear!"

In spite of fiercest effort, Stephen felt himself obeying the voice, the lambent burning eyes that drew him . . . drew him . . .

He was compelled. His slow, reluctant feet moved forward, he began to cross the width of polished floor between fire and bed. It seemed like some tremendous journey. Cold, deadly conviction of loss and loneliness made those few yards of flooring beneath his feet wider than all the deserts of the world.

Rosaina and his love for her, Rosaina's stricken body close beside him, Rosaina and all their winged and shining future faded in that moment of his strange journey to Mark Zennor's bedside, faded to a small cloudy dream . . . insubstantial . . . drifting . . . drifting out of sight . . . out of mind.

MIDNIGHT approached.

The blood-red sands sank low in the hourglass, trickling through a bunch of glass grapes held by an excessively female figure into the opened mouth of an aggressively male one. When the glass swung over, the sands would flow back in a fashion as original as it was unprintable.

Stephen glanced up at the thing and back to the still figure on the bed.

Thank heaven! His hour of vigil was almost over. An hour. It seemed a lifetime since he had pledged himself, left hand in the dying man's cold strong grip, to carry out his uncle's last wish —to be his sin-eater. What a perfectly silly heathenish little ceremonial! And what peculiarly different things brought comfort to the dying! Certainly this last whim of his Uncle Mark's was outstandingly strange.

Little the dead man had ever cared about his sins! A man who refused to recognize any moral code at all, who never applied the words *good* or *evil* to conduct, who lived for experience alone—any—all experience.

His sin-eater! Fantastic notion! When last wishes had been mentioned, Stephen had imagined something far more formidable, something aimed at separating him from Rosaina. But this sin-eating business was merely a gesture —and a pitiful one considering the dead man's extraordinary intellect.

A baffling incalculable character. Sometimes he'd practised harsh rigid ascetism, reduced his great frame to a skeleton. Sometimes he'd indulged his senses in debaucheries that ought to have killed him—and didn't! He'd used brain and body to their utmost capacity in every conceivable way.

Stephen had known all this before taking on the duties of a secretary two years ago. What he hadn't known, and still didn't believe in, was the reality of the dead man's art. That was his uncle's name for the over-ruling interest of his violent and checkered life.

Stephen was a brilliant young man in his own particular line but he never conceived of anything that came under the heading of occult as being more than the rankest imagination. And imagination, he reasoned, belonged to poets and children in its better manifestations, and to drug-fiends and the morally and mentally deficient in its worse ones.

When a man died, argued Stephen, he utterly ceased to be, save as a memory. Death—death of the body was the end of a man as a separate individual. His work alone survived.

His uncle's work! Stephen reflected on it as represented by the many books that bore Mark Zennor's name. He'd read some of them, a few that were written in English and dealt with scientific subjects. He'd been taken out of his depth and had never tackled the more recondite in German and French. There were books on philosophy in Chinese, Sanskrit, and Hebrew. There were books on music equally beyond his comprehension. He'd tried a volume of poetry once but decided that all the Turkish baths in the world wouldn't make him feel clean after such literary explorations as these.

However, there was one book in the Lamorna library which he had been forced to know from cover to cover. He had made its black linen covers himself and printed every word of the text between them. It was not published, not publishable. It had been his first and most unpleasant task as his uncle's secretary to print this book on the private press that Zennor owned. A short book and a damnable one. The author's references to past vile experiences and experiments, and to others even more monstrous which he intended to carry out, haunted Stephen for months. To his clear young mind such revelations of immense research and familiarity with unspeakable beliefs and practises were lewd expressions of insanity, the excesses of a megalomaniac whose ambitions rivaled Lucifer's.

Finally, however, he grew callous. Profound disbelief enabled him to do his daily work with the detachment of a machine. He ceased even to wonder why his uncle had wasted time and his amazing intellectual powers over such insane and filthy nonsense.

"Yes, filthy nonsense!"

He repeated the words aloud. He was beginning to feel the necessity of reassurance. This vigil was getting on his nerves. Something was wrong with the lamp—it needed refilling, perhaps. His uncle had insisted on lamps and costly special oil for them that made the whole house reek. Tonight the lamp and the fire too—what was wrong?—everything seemed on the jump. Shadows. Beastly what queer imitations of life a shadow could give! Shadows—in that foul little book—they were said to be——

He thrust back persistent words and images, and glanced toward the bed. The old man looked extraordinary. His arms and hands lay naturally by his side, the fingers crisped a little in the characteristic way they had in life. His eyes were open.

"Don't close my eyes, remember, Stephen!" he had commanded. "I want to watch you perform the ceremony."

And, although Stephen would have preferred to close those merciless bright eyes, he had given his word and could not bring himself to break it. He tried, however, to be mocking at his obedience, to be watching, waiting . . . waiting . . .

He attempted once more to reason about the thing.

"It's merely reflex action. The old man died believing in all his sticky little devil-worshipping ideas. He died happy in the thought that he was pushing all the results of his highly colored life on to my shoulders and went off believing this sin-eating business would square his accounts. That explains the peculiar expression in his eyes. And that half-smile!"

He frowned, stared.

"It certainly seems more pronounced. Probably it's those drugs he poured into himself to keep going as long as he wanted. When the rigor passes his muscles will relax. Nasty look on a dead face though—very nasty. Still it's perfectly explainable—perfectly!"

He wrenched his gaze from those fixed, sightless eyes. Sightless! It was hard to believe they really were that.

"He knew what he was about when he made me promise not to close them. Damned if the old devil's not at his old games even now he's dead. Trying to hypnotize me."

He moved restlessly, tried to laugh. The face of the dead expressed considerably more amusement than did his own; yet remembrance of this trick of his uncle's brought relief to the watcher. Hypnotism! That was it. That covered everything, especially the strange sensations he'd had just before his Uncle Mark had died. Idiotic to have laid himself open to it—to have let imagination ride him so completely.

Thanks be! It had passed off almost at once.

Probably Rosaina's collapse had unnerved him, made him susceptible to suggestion. It was the very first time his uncle had ever caught *him* napping. His self-congratulation was unclouded by suspicion of design in this fact.

Rosaina! He looked at her. Still as a statue, white, frozen. Nothing he said or did could wake her.

"When you've fulfilled your promise, Stephen! She won't wake until then," Zennor had repeated. "Not until the hour is up and you've become my sin-eater."

Somehow he felt less concerned about her now — the strained white face, the terror-filled eyes, the slender limbs held as if in bonds! Hypnotized. He felt a faint contempt for the weakness that made her so easy a victim, even a sort of respect for the dominance of a will that could, even after death, exert its influence. Anyhow, if she were in a trance she felt nothing. No use his agonizing over her. Not long now to wait.

A FAINT whirring of machinery drew his glance to the hourglass. Its last grains had run out. Chimes of midnight sounded from some deep-toned village clock. Noiselessly, smoothly, the big hourglass turned in its half-circle.

He got to his feet, stood beside the dead body. At last he'd get the thing over and done with.

The first red grains ran back as he stretched out a hand toward the bared breast of the corpse. Those eyes! The light in them still. Surely—surely the dull fire couldn't strike that gleam in them? No, of course not. It was those infernal candles at the foot of the bed. Probably the wax contained some filthy ingredient that was affecting his eyes. Nothing his Uncle Mark had used was normal or natural. He was forever experimenting on his own senses and on other people's. The whole house ought to be burned down. Fire was the only purge for so much dangerous rubbish. That book in the library—everything suggestive, indecent. Yes, fire was the

proper cure. He was so furious, so humiliated by the repugnant fear he felt of touching the corpse that he suddenly shouted at it:

"I'd like to burn the house down and you in it!"

Naturally there was no reply. Or was there? Didn't the dead man's grinning lips draw back a trifle further? Didn't the fixed eyeballs roll slightly in their sockets to meet his frantic angry gaze?

He cursed himself for a fool. A fool to have promised to carry out this fantastic post-mortem charade. A fool not to break his promise now. And fool most of all to get the wind up like this if he *was* going to do it.

He forced himself to take the parchment roll from under the dead man's hand.

He broke its black seal, unwound the tape, opened out the crackling sheet. His face darkened as he read the strong black lettering. This thing that seemed so childish and superstitious an hour ago began to assume a new aspect in its fulfilment. And for this, Stephen cursed his imagination now, rather than his lack of it in the first place.

Consulting the parchment from minute to minute he began to obey the directions written there.

"Take up the wafer that is in the mazar-bowl," he read. "Mazar? I suppose he means black-cherry wood."

Yes, there was the small wooden bowl on a table beside the bed. He took out of it a wafer whose smooth black surface was pricked in a deadly device he failed to understand. His fingers, colder than the dead flesh he touched, placed the wafer on the bared breast of the corpse.

Another, smaller bowl stood filled with water. And this also he put on the dead man's breast.

Then, turning to the table again, he dipped his trembling fingers into a handful of salt around which five minute black candles burned in a circle. Their tiny flames licked up fiercely as his hand was outstretched above them. Pain set his whole body on fire. He stood rigid, agonized. Suddenly the burning ceased. Only in his brain a strange sense of heat remained as if the fiery ordeal had left a spark upon the altar of his mind.

The salt he had taken up he now sprinkled upon the wafer and into the water. Once again he consulted the written words, put out an obedient hand, let it fall with a groan.

"No! No!" he muttered. "I don't like this business. It's—there's something I don't like about it! I believe he's——"

Against his will he looked up, caught the fixed dead eyes that seemed so piercingly to watch him, and again he felt a sense of utter powerlessness. Again, as when he first agreed to be his uncle's sin-eater, his resolution fatally relaxed. The fire in his brain dissolved the half-formed premonition of his danger.

Before the hard cold glitter in the dead man's eyes his own fell. He raised the bowl of water and held it out with stiffly extended arms toward the corpse. His hoarse strained voice came haltingly:

"I drink this water, with salt that can compel, that your sins may be washed from your soul. Let them flow—as this water—from you to me. I receive the great darkness of your sins. I give the light of my soul that your own may walk in it forever."

He shuddered violently as he turned, bowl in hand, to each of the four corners of the room, repeating the form of words each time. Then, putting the

water to his lips he drained it and tossed the bowl away.

And now he knew no trick of candle or firelight had set that flame of wicked malice dancing in the eyes that held his own, or brought those capering shadows all about him. The fire within his brain worked like madness. He was part of all this now. He loved as much as loathed it. He desired as greatly as he feared to share the dead man's secret power.

He took up the wafer, turned again to each corner of the darkening room to repeat the written formula. Now his voice rose loud and defiant as he faced the corpse:

"Mark Zennor, with this bread and the salt that has power to seal my vow, I eat your sins. Give me the burden of them. I take their weight on my soul. I, your sin-eater, give my soul's rest for yours eternally."

He put the wafer in his mouth. It crumbled to salt dust on his tongue. As he swallowed it he was aware that the flame of life within him was rising higher—higher—higher. And, with its soaring, towering, leaping life, he seemed to touch the stars. Then, with awful downward plunge, he sank—swift—swooning—down to thunderous abysmal dark. . . .

"STEPHEN! Stephen!"

He roused himself. Rosaina was kneeling by his side where he lay on the floor. Her arms were about him. Her tears fell on his face. He got up, drawing her also to her feet, and looked down at her tragic face. He felt as though he'd been under the sea, submerged, almost drowned. His fears, his pain, the madness in his brain were washed away.

Rosaina held him with desperate convulsive pressure. He felt the wild beating of her heart against his breast. She couldn't speak. His low murmured words of love seemed to increase her dreadful shuddering agitation.

At last her sobbing breath was stilled, and she leaned against him in utter exhaustion as he stroked her golden shining hair.

"Darling! Dearest!" he whispered. "He's gone at last, left us free, you and me! You and me, my own! Rose! My golden lovely Rose! Love me, love me and forget the rest."

She didn't move or speak. Once she turned to kiss the fingers that rested on her hair, and the cold pressure of her lips startled him—her clasp, her kiss were so despairing. Then she cried out again:

"Stephen! Stephen! *Stephen!"*

"Darling! I am here—holding you—close—close. Why do you call as if I were leaving you?"

"Stephen! You are—you are leaving me!"

She pushed him away, stood with white tragic face and haunted eyes.

"Oh, Stephen, my dear!—my dear! Don't you understand at all what you have done?"

"You mean that barbaric little ceremony? Dearest, you simply can't believe there's anything in that! You might as well believe in ghosts and witches and devils—or—or anything," he finished lamely.

"I do believe in devils. He was a devil—served by devils. Didn't you see what held me bound this past hour, Stephen? Didn't you *see?"*

"The old man hypnotized you. I tried to wake you up—I tried repeatedly."

"You saw nothing — felt nothing when you touched me? Oh, it's come, it's come at last—our punishment for loving. How fast he's got you now!

He'll drag you down to hell—down to hell."

She went close to him again, looked up into his frowning bewildered face.

"His sin-eater. *His sins.* Have you any idea what Mark's sins were? No! How could you—when even I—although I can't sleep for remembering, for remembering — even I can only guess at——"

Her face grew ashen but she moved back from his imploring arms.

"Wait, wait, Stephen darling! Oh, try to understand—try to believe me. It was real, that ceremony of the sin-eater. You *have* taken Mark's sins from him."

"You really believe that?" His tone was the more emphatic for a cold creeping doubt that chilled him now. "Darling, you can't be so mediæval and superstitious as that!"

"I know, I know I'm right," she urged. "You're in hideous danger. Oh, if you believed me even now it might be possible to——"

She broke off, seized his hands and pressed them to her breast.

"Stephen! Stephen! Of course, I remember now what he said to me about Mark's illness, and that I must tell him if— Come quickly, quickly! We'll ask him to help you."

She clasped him in an agony of relief.

"Mr. Sant—don't you remember?—don't you remember he said Mark was not ill? He promised to return before any crisis arose if he could."

"No, I forget all about it. But he'd think me a fool to go to him with this tale.

"Uncle Mark was mad and you can be sure Sant knew it. He's the most celebrated alienist in Europe. Sant would count me as a patient if he thought I believed this. What can it signify—a few silly words gabbled over a dead body? Look here, Rosaina, let's get out of this room and talk somewhere else; even the sight of his corpse——"

She glanced over her shoulder as they went, hand in hand, to the door. Her loud cry seemed to the man to come from his own lips as he turned and stared also at the bed.

"Look! Look! Ah-h-h! Look at him now!"

He dropped her hand, strode to the cavernous bed. The face of the corpse was the face of one utterly at peace. Its bright staring eyes were closed, its lips gravely folded, every line that lust and pride had deeply stamped was smoothed away.

It was the face of one whose soul had found its rest.

Rosaina pressed close to Stephen. She stood staring . . . staring. . . . Her white trembling lips whispered over and over and over:

"You are his sin-eater—his sin-eater—his sin-eater! You have taken the evil from him."

They turned to look at each other. Her eyes searched his in frantic love and agony, dreading to see in them what he had taken from the dead. He returned her look. Faint impatience pricked him. He'd had enough melodrama for one night, he felt. Rosaina was—what had his Uncle Mark once said of an Arab woman he'd bought in Touggourt? Oh, yes! "Zobeide, my dear nephew, was a ——"

He pulled himself up. Good heavens!

What had brought that lewd story to his mind—and in connection with Rosaina? He turned in horrified contrition.

"Dearest, you must come away. This place reeks of him and his beastliness."

"OH, YES, please! Yes, we'll come at once. No, not here! I can't talk to you in *his* house."

Sant put down the telephone receiver, stood gazing at it. His mind was roused to extraordinary activity. His memory was gathering up facts, proofs, experience from the immense field of his knowledge. The whole situation was changed now.

The great tawny Persian cat, lying with head sunk between straightly extended forepaws, felt a break in the continuity of his peace. He looked up, gave a small inquiring trill of protest. His master picked him up and tucked the satin head beneath his own chin.

"Hároon Er-Rasheed, my old friend, it's bad news—the worst possible news! Mark Zennor is dead."

He held the cat so that he might look into his benevolent peaceful face. The animal rubbed a cold friendly nose against his own.

"Oh, yes, I know I'm clever, my dear. But so is he, most infernally so, and if he's dead it's because he didn't wish to remain alive. For the moment I can't fathom his reasons—that is what we've got to discover."

Hároon Er-Rasheed burrowed his muzzle into the palm of Sant's hand and gurgled consolation.

"Well, I'm glad you believe in me so utterly. It all helps. But we must think—we must think."

With the gentle deliberation approved by that nervously constituted aristocrat he put the big cat down. Turning to his bookshelves he took out a battered volume entitled *The Human Will*. His visitors could not be here immediately, for his house was fairly inaccessible from Trink Village and the motor-road made a very long detour.

As this is the story of Zennor's death and of certain events immediately consequent on that crisis, it would be tedious to go back in any detail into circumstances of how and when these two men had previously come into conflict. The affairs were too elaborate, a great many other people were involved in them, and they had never been in the nature of man-to-man duels. Rather, Sant had interfered, very quietly, very circumspectly on a number of occasions in order to frustrate some of Zennor's ripest and most deadly plans.

By the time a rapid muffled knocking sounded at his front door, Sant had traveled a long journey in his thoughts. His immense power of concentration had marshaled his every encounter with Zennor and criticized each anew. In the light of his last dramatic move, everything Zennor had done or not done assumed less or more importance.

"Yes," reflected Sant aloud, as he rose to let in his visitors. "His death is a retreat in one sense, but it means that he has fallen back on some superior vantage-ground. My task is to discover what it is."

The welcoming light which, from the vestibule of his house, shone like a little star on the lonely hillside, showed Rosaina and Stephen to Sant as he opened his door to them.

Both were changed. He knew that instantly. It was a new and different quality of fear that now whitened the girl's face, aging and withering her inexpressibly. In Stephen's keen alertness there was now an edge of antagonism. A first faint pattern of the dead man's plan began to take shape in Sant's mind.

He led them in to his warm fire, and it did not surprise him to see his cat pressing up against the door as he opened it, but as the creature shot past his legs and away, ears flattened back,

tail stiffened in angry fright, the pattern of Sant's thoughts was stamped a trifle more clearly. His eyes took on the gray remoteness of a winter sea, always a sign of intense mental preoccupation with him. He didn't, however, communicate his thoughts, but merely listened to their story and put extremely pertinent questions.

"About that one special book you recollected when Zennor had died and you were keeping vigil by him. It seems to me very important. I must get hold of that book you printed."

"I suppose it would be a good idea." Stephen felt a peculiar reluctance all of a sudden to part with that black-bound book. "I'll see if I can find it for you."

"Thanks. Tomorrow morning, then."

Stephen was astonished at his own stab of furious anger. He was an even-tempered man and, although he was roused at rare intervals, it took a great deal to make him angry. Also, when that happened, he always felt cold as a block of ice. Never in his life before had he experienced such fiery murderous hate as flared up in him now.

SANT pretended not to see the vivid, if very fleeting, change in the other's face.

A strong revulsion of feeling seized the younger man. "Yes," he begged, "do come and take the thing away. I can't bear to remember I printed it, helped to perpetuate such foulness. It's coming back to me as we talk what it was all about, at least so far as I understood it. When I was working on it I was convinced Rosaina was somehow concerned—the human sacrifice—but there were a good many sacrifices mentioned, and she couldn't have been the same 'golden woman' who died in Persia thousands of years B. C., or a Libyan princess in the time of Alexander the Great, or a slave in A.D. 50! And yet the book——"

Sant's blank calm face effectually concealed his thoughts.

"Yes. Do go on," he encouraged; "this is all most relevant."

"Of course," confessed Stephen, "most of it was gibberish to me. Uncle Mark claimed to have been reincarnated over and over again. He had to find something—or someone to complete a Triad—a mystic perfect Triad. It had to be three who were bound each to the other in some mysterious way. Then he could offer his last sacrifice through the medium of the Triple Link. His great object seemed to be the possession of a Key——"

"The Key of Thoth?"

"Yes. That's what he was after—the Key of Thoth." He met Sant's grave eyes. "It's all pretty much of a jumble in my mind. I didn't understand one word in a hundred. But I do remember that he'd got to have some special sort of co-operation for his sacrifice."

"Stephen! What else—what else?"

Rosaina's voice was sharp with anxiety.

He looked at her rather vacantly, his brows drew together, he ruffled his thick brown hair. "It was fairly evident that he felt he'd got to the end of his search. There was a lot about his High Priest and the bond of blood to seal his bargain."

Sant's eyes were very cold, very remote. "I see." He looked intently at the other man.

"Damned if you do!" blazed Stephen suddenly. "It was my uncle's great secret, the goal of all he'd ever done or thought or lived for! No one—*no one* ever so much as guessed at his tremendous success—at the things he'd discovered."

"Stephen!"

Rosaina's cry brought him to himself. She shrank from his touch, turned to Sant with unmistakable appeal.

"He's worn out—as you are." Sant's voice was stern now. "You mustn't show fear, Rosaina, you mustn't feel fear! It will injure him. If your love has any depth and reality you've got to help him. You can't leave him now."

"Leave him?" stammered the girl.

"Certainly. You left him when you turned to me then. Now listen to me, both of you!"

He looked into Stephen's dark eyes. Anger made them glitter. His thin face seemed a trifle squarer, his lips a trifle fuller.

The rough dark hair took a red gleam from the firelight.

"Stephen," Sant put a hand on the other's twitching one, "you're afraid too and you're giving ground to the enemy. It's no use keeping up any sort of pretense about this; we must work together, it's our wills against—the dead!"

"His sin-eater. I am his sin-eater."

Stephen spoke, not in horror so much as in warning and reminder.

"You were ignorant and foolish. You let Zennor trick you once—are you going to let him go on doing it, Stephen Lynn?"

The other got hastily to his feet, held out his hand.

"No!—no! I'm not! No, I'm all right again now and I'll fight him until I die."

"And that won't do, either." Sant gripped him strongly. "You've got to live. You've got to find out how to free yourself."

He turned to Rosaina.

"I won't disturb my housekeeper so late—or so early! It's almost three o'clock in the morning. You shall have my room. There aren't any others ready. Stephen will do very well down here by the fire. I must go to Lamorna House at once."

He spoke with eyes on Stephen's face, saw gratitude and relief suddenly sharpen to suspicion. Some sort of struggle was going on in the young man's mind. Sant went off with Rosaina, and returned to find Stephen in hat and coat.

"It might be better if I went back with you, after all. You can——" he hesitated. "Oh—if—of course, if you prefer—no, I'll come! You can keep an eye on me then."

His companion regarded him with absorbed attention.

"Don't you mean you want to keep an eye on me?" he corrected. "Come if you will, by all means."

Again the younger man hesitated, then spoke in slow sulky tones.

"It would be better. The servants would think it queer if Rosaina and I were both here and you in possession at Lamorna House. Uncle Mark left like that!"

"Of course," Sant heartily concurred. "We'll go together."

They found Lamorna House abominably quiet—a challenging sinister quiet that met them on the threshold with all the force of swarming invisible assailants in possession of a stronghold. As they went through the hall and up the broad stairs, shadows seemed to peer and watch, to keep guard over the dead.

In the chamber of death they found the tall black candles still burning steadily at the foot of the bed. The head of the corpse lay deeply sunk into the pillows. On its face a yet profounder calm had settled. Sant looked down in silence. He hid his deep dis-

quiet from Stephen, standing beside him; but, turning sharply, he surprised a strange smile dawning in the young man's dark eyes, a smile that spread as Sant watched it — loosening the fine curve of the mouth, aging and coarsening the eager face.

He faced the corpse and spoke a few rapid words under his breath. For a moment the look of infinite calm on Mark Zennor's face seemed to break and alter—as the surface of smooth water is ruffled by a sudden angry gust of wind.

But it was Stephen who answered Sant's words. What he said was unintelligible to himself—the words rushed from between his lips — his hands clenched—his whole body stiffened. Then, under the penetrating steady look with which Sant met his outburst he drew back. His taut muscles slackened. He looked almost stupidly bewildered.

"Sorry! Did you say anything? I felt dizzy all of a sudden."

"I didn't know you spoke Arabic!"

"Arabic!" echoed Stephen. "Why, I don't speak it—don't understand a word of it. What makes you say so?"

"Only that you cursed me very competently in that tongue just now."

Stephen's bewildered frown deepened to a scowl. "You seem as much off your balance as Rosaina. I've never spoken a word of Arabic in my life."

"Forgive me!" Sant put a hand on his arm. "I'm not playing tricks on you—it is *he* who is doing that. I wanted to prove something and I've done so. Come away. This empty shell he's left—everything here reeks of him—tainted—poisonous! Come, Stephen!"

Outside the room, Sant locked the door and pocketed the key. Instantly his companion's eyes blazed with fury, but it died down and faded at the older man's friendly smile and touch.

"Look here, Sant, I can't stand this, I'm all in a fog—can't seem to get a grip on myself. Can you give me something to make me sleep? If I could sleep, forget the last few hours, I might——"

"The very best thing," agreed the other.

THEY went downstairs again. In his own private study, Stephen switched on an electric radiator and produced drinks. An hour later he was sleeping heavily, stretched out in an easy-chair. Sant made for the library; he knew he must get hold of Mark Zennor's book before he was prevented.

He found it at last, sat down at a desk, and began to examine it. He read on and on. Dawn crept up to the tall, uncurtained windows. Warmth of the rising sun touched his cheek as he sat, fell on the printed page before him.

He got to his feet abruptly and flung up the nearest window, thrust out his head to breathe deeply of the keen salt air from the Atlantic. In the east a streak of yellow kindled behind glimmering ghostly bare trees. He faced the strong clear radiance. Ah! How good the sharp sweet air — the untainted dawn! How cleansing after the abominable pages of Zennor's book! He leaned against the window-frame, half closed his eyes, surrendered his tired mind and body to the spell.

A robin warned him. Young and bold and hungry, it fluttered to the broad sill on which his hand rested.

Cheep! Cheep! Cheep! *Cheep!*

Sant's eyelids lifted. He caught sight of a shadow on a side-pane of the bay window and turned in time to snatch up the open book. Stephen stood beside the desk, a queer stiff automatic

figure, his eyes wide open but glazed with sleep. As the book was withdrawn his lips drew back in a savage grimace and a blaze of vivid hate shone through the dreaming dark eyes. The hand outstretched to pick up the book drew back with crisping crooked fingers like the talons of a bird of prey.

Sant leaned forward, looking deep into the black fixed eyes of the sleep-walker.

"No, Mark Zennor—not yet! I stand between you and this man you have betrayed. I fight for Stephen Lynn—for his body and for his soul."

Again hate leaped like white fire in the fixed eyes, and for a moment the mask of Stephen's face quivered, altered, expanded to hideous semblance of the dead.

Sant drew closer, put all his will into repulsing the assault. "Not yet," he repeated. "You dare not take possession of this human body now. The four hands of Adda Nari still hold the four elements from your grasp. You are not yet wholly freed from the Wheel. The laws of human life still bind and limit you."

Fiery hate died to blankness in the eyes opposite his own. He blew lightly in the set young face.

"Wake, my dear boy—wake!"

Stephen was bewildered, annoyed, and very tired.

"What's it all about? Sleep-walking! Never done that before. Heavens! What a beastly draft!"

He slammed down the open window against the still twittering robin and rang a bell.

"Those lazy good-for-nothing servants! Snoring away upstairs. They can jolly well come down and do their bit. I'll have enough on my hands now with funeral arrangements and all the rest of it."

He looked far more exhausted than before he'd slept.

"What were you working at? That book of my uncle's—eugh! Better burn it—burn the whole library—everything!"

"Yes, I agree, but not until I've come to the end of the trail I'm following; not until I know how strong a link he made to bind you to him."

"That sin-eating charade?" Stephen's look was derisive. "Y'know we all got the wind up pretty badly last night. No man could believe in such mumbo-jumbo—not now, in broad daylight. Last night was different. After watching Uncle Mark all those hours—and he was a—well, he's gone now, no need to dissect his unpleasant character more than necessary. Anyhow last night's over and done with! As to the rest——"

"You mean you no longer feel in any danger?"

"Danger? No, except of making a fool of myself. Last night he hypnotized Rosaina and I believe he put some sort of a 'come hither' on me too. Making the most of his last hours I suppose. I don't want to think of, or talk about, or remember last night any more."

"Perfectly natural and normal, but unfortunately your attitude gives Mark Zennor a clear field."

"What—with me!"

Stephen stared, then burst into a laugh. Sounds of steps in the hall interrupted him.

"One of the Seven Sleepers at last—butler probably," he went on. "Better go and tell him about Uncle Mark. He'll want to warn the maids and trot round pulling down blinds, etc. Servants adore deaths and funerals and all the gloom and wreaths and hushed voices and all the rest of it. There

won't be tears, at least. No one in the wide world could regret Uncle Mark's death. There's the telephone, that'll be Rosaina—hope she slept better than I did, poor darling!"

It was after the funeral that Sant missed Stephen.

"I can drive the car, of course," he told Rosaina as he tucked a rug about her knees. "But——"

She gave a shiver, nor was it the keen north-east wind that chilled her.

"We can't wait here in the churchyard for him. Let's go back..

A crackling log-fire and Sant's big yellow cat gave them welcome. Rosaina sank to a chair by the leaping flames and tossed her hat on the rug. She'd cast aside all the rich flaunting golds that Mark had insisted on, and in a dark tweed suit she looked less sophisticated and considerably more tired and fragile.

Hároon Er-Rasheed inspected her hat with deep interest and a running commentary of sounds peculiar to himself, then leaped to her knee.

Sant smiled down on them both. "Not much of you visible now. I must see that Zennor's book is safe before looking for Stephen."

He crossed over to a bookcase and pulled out from behind a row of dusty folios a box clamped with silver, unlocked it with a key on a bunch in his pocket.

The box was empty!

"Gone! Stephen evidently made straight for it. It had a preface with elaborate detailed instructions for reaching the hidden entrance to a vault or crypt beneath Lamorna House—Zennor had converted it into a sort of chapel."

She stared up at him.

"The book! Instructions! D'you think Stephen's gone down to that horrible place?"

"Sure of it. He's been trying to do it ever since Zennor's death. I dogged him like his own shadow — he'd no chance until this afternoon. I saw him slip away from the graveside, but I couldn't run after him then.

"I've made a copy of those instructions." He put a hand into his breast-pocket and drew out a few thin crackling sheets from a case. "Impossible to find the place without this key. I'll have to follow at once."

"I must come too. Yes!—yes!" she got to her feet impetuously. "I can't wait here alone. You don't know what horrible thoughts I have."

"Believe me, I do know, but I ask you to stay. The danger is acute for all three of us, most of all for Stephen. For his sake I must go alone. I'm not powerful enough to give you protection if sudden attack came. If you hinder me or distract me and I fail—you and he are also lost, remember."

She met his eyes bravely.

"You're very clever, and very strong. I believe in you with all my heart. And I'll do my best to—to believe in myself too. But bring Stephen back to me! Oh, bring him back!"

"Bring Stephen back to me!" An hour later her passionate appeal echoed in Sant's ears as if Rosaina's strained white face still looked into his, while eyes and lips implored, "Oh, bring him back to me!"

On the threshold of a vast and vaulted chapel he stood cold and stiff as the carven monstrosities within it, his eyes fixed on a great altar that faced the entrance. Before the altar a man was standing—a man who elaborately genuflected and abased himself. The man was Stephen Lynn.

Sant, who knew the value and the meaning of each gesture, knew also that he was too late to interfere.

"It would kill him outright now," he murmured; "he's in trance. Zennor's taken complete control. He means to strike at once without giving me time to prepare. Yet the Universal Agent turns to its ebb! He's broken his Rule. He means to sacrifice before his Hour."

He took a few steps into the heavy perfumed gloom. What light there was beat down upon the altar-steps, above which a great metal globe hung, suspended in midair by magnetic force, a globe that received long shafts of light from concealed sources and gave them off again in dazzling hypnotic points of fire.

Sant carefully avoided raising his eyes. As carefully he moved forward, choosing his steps over the bizarre mosaic of the marble floor. He knew the deadly trap of the symbolic tree whose reversed branches spread under his feet. He knew what dark magic lent iridescent gleam to the peacocks set within their topaz circles. His lips murmured the Words and a Word as he trod between the stippled ochreous coils of two serpents intertwined. His hands moved in strange rapid gestures as he followed a narrow track of alternating black and yellow tiles, setting each foot on the black, advancing with the swaying balance of a tight-rope walker.

And now he halted. On the chapel pavement before him glowed a full moon, red, ominous as spilt blood. He anxiously examined it. If the moon revealed— Yes! So faint that only an initiate might discern its awful significance, an ovoid luminous shadow moved within the confines of its own circumference, vaporous, restless, potent, dread symbol—the Orphean Egg.

Sant waited, watched a curl of bluish mist rise from the full moon's strange matrix, stood like a stone as it curled about his feet, his knees, his body, his stiffly erect head. Only with his will might he control this force—creator and destroyer before the earth was formed. Behind the dreadful veil that hung about him, his face showed the grimness of the ordeal. Vapor swirled and eddied swifter, denser every moment. Sant knew the pains of death, the pangs of rebirth, but he endured, and at last stood free.

Back to its living source the vapor sank as he moved forward to the lowest altar-step. He had received a baptism, and nothing in this place, dedicated to evil, might harm him in this hour.

He looked up instantly at the altar. The spare young figure knelt in rigid stillness now and every line expressed tense prodigious effort of concentration. A voice continuously rose and fell, but not Stephen's voice—the timbre was fuller and more richly modulated, a trained and powerful instrument whose deep notes held the sound of far-off stormy seas.

It was Mark Zennor's voice that rose and fell—rose and fell in magic compelling cadences! Zennor calling on his dark gods, reiterating his impious vows, drawing to his service a vast army of the damned.

Velvet-shod, Sant moved another step upward. And now he blotted out his own personality that it might make no impingement on the etheric waves of evil which the worshipper was drawing to himself. On all sides he felt strong pressure of occult power—subservient, dominated by the man at the altar above him.

"Bring him back to me!"

The words thrilled through his brain, for he could not obey them now. This

man kneeling by the great Stone of Sacrifice was Stephen Lynn's human habitation merely. Within it, controlling, drilling an unaccustomed body to its ritual, was Mark Zennor's proud satanic brilliant mind.

"Bring Stephen back to me!"

Impossible now. Zennor had long ago too thoroughly prepared his ground, too completely trapped his victim from the first moment of their contact. He listened intently. The words rapped out firmer, quicker, more peremptory now. The climax approached.

The great chapel, circular in shape, had walls that rose curving, darkly luminous, satin-smooth as the petals of a vast black tulip, to meet a vaulted roof—their polished surface broken by squat archways behind which darkness lay like a crouching beast of prey.

Above the huge slab of the altar-stone was a reredos of red alabaster, a screen some thirty feet by ten. It was powerfully illumined from behind, so that its carving stood out in bold relief and a trick in the lighting gave a sinister effect of constant movement.

This screen was a vivid presentment of a human sacrifice. Bound on the stone-altar, a woman appeared to writhe and quiver. Her long bright hair rippled down to a deep trough about the altar-base. Into this same trough trickled a thin dark stream of blood from a knife which pierced the victim's body. About the altar stood tall candles whose flames danced in frenzy.

And behind the candles' flare and flicker, at each of the four corners of the altar, a veiled figure towered. Menacing, gigantic, these figures were the only immovable objects on the screen, and they achieved by their fateful stillness—in contrast with the surge and movement of all else in the picture—an effect of final inescapable doom. Dark crescent moons poised above each veiled head of these four attendant genii bearing Hebrew characters which read—EARTH. WINTER. NIGHT. DEATH.

And now Sant saw the black-clad figure—the body of Stephen Lynn, torn and wrenched, trembling from head to foot in diabolic ecstasy, arms flung wide, head bent backward so that light from the suspended globe beat full and fiercely down upon the upturned face. Louder—louder rang the great triumphant organ voice, pealing out into the unclean silence of the chapel's gloom, beating against the curved and shining walls which sent back clashing pæans of tremendous harmony—

"Thus have I conquered, ye Genii of the Twelve Hours!
Thus are all things subdued to my Will!
By wisdom I have pierced Truth.
By intelligence I have cast down idols.
By strength I have bound Death in chains.
By patience I have fathomed the Infinite.
Now is the Universe wholly revealed to me.
Ye Terrible Ones! Princes of the kingdoms and heavens of Pharzuph, of Sialul, of Aeglun, of Aclahayr,
I, who have worshipped and obeyed, shall serve no more.
Princes of Earth, of Air, of Fire, of Water,
The Four Elements you rule are as dust under my heel.
I am invulnerable—beyond Death and Change forever.
The six wings of Bereschott cover me.
The Rock of Yesod beneath my feet.
Bow down in homage! BOW DOWN!"

Sant, his eyes on the tense convulsed figure, saw it sway. Its outflung arms dropped.

The dark head leaned back—back until Sant could see its greenish pallor and half-veiled eyes. Rigid, entranced, the spirit within him caught up into dark swooning ecstasy, Stephen fell back slowly, slowly into Sant's waiting arms.

"FRIDAY afternoon! A few more hours, Adrian—only a few hours now."

Sant glanced at Rosaina, got up from his chair and began to walk up and down his study. Presently he lighted a pipe, let it go out between his clenched teeth as he paced to and fro. He looked out across his garden where violets, anemones and jonquils braved February winds and tall daffodils danced to its piping. His absent gaze followed the course of a valley and rested at last on the stretch of ocean beyond. Gray, turbulent, troubled as his own thoughts, the Atlantic lay under a leaden sky. His brooding look dwelt on it as if in this vast element he found ease for his soul.

"Adrian!"

He turned back to Rosaina, sitting by the fire, his heart contracted with pity at sight of her. How altered since Zennor's death! Not all the tragic years of her marriage had broken her as these few days of torturing anxiety for the man she loved.

Sant's burden grew heavier as he met her eyes; she looked so lost, so wild, so grief-stricken; her body seemed transparent in the firelit dusk; her golden hair was lifeless and faded, the delicate lines of face and neck painfully evident, the amber eyes two deep pools of weariness. Body, mind and spirit could endure little more. And yet they *must!* And tonight. There could be no halt in the tremendous impetus of the occult rhythm of events. Zennor, through his chosen medium, Stephen Lynn, could not himself alter the impending climax now. Tonight he gained all, or lost all. There was no middle course.

He had challenged the Four Ancient Ones, and must prove their master or be for ever enslaved. Tonight he must achieve the goal for which he had striven since his first incarnation on earth by offering the Perfect Sacrifice to complete the Triad of his protection.

Tonight! That much Zennor had revealed through Stephen on the day of the funeral while Sant watched in the chapel. And because it was tonight, Sant knew his enemy feared him and his influence; for Zennor's own baneful star would not be at its zenith until the next moon's waning, in the Tenth Hour, called Malaen.

The genii of that Hour were strong and slaves to Zennor's will. They had been the heat of his blood, the shadow of his body, the breath of his nostrils when—in his first life on earth—he had, in shaggy beast-like form, run on all fours through forests of the north, forests dug up now as coal from under the crust of the world. Tonight these genii would serve him well. The Hour was favorable—but less favorable than the Tenth Hour, called Malaen. Zennor would have been stronger in the next moon's waning.

He went back to Rosaina, drew up a chair beside her. No hint of anxiety showed in the tranquil face he turned to her. He did not doubt her courage now, but he doubted whether the frail hold she had on life would carry her through the ordeal required of it. And she must live. *She must defeat Zennor on this plane while in the flesh.* Divorced from her body, he could not help her. Her ego and Stephen's too would be incorporated with Zennor's, made one with his damned soul.

She voiced his thoughts.

"I shouldn't have lasted another twenty-four hours. Another night. The night, oh God! Adrian!"

He bit hard on his pipe-stem and nodded.

"Even though you sat outside my door to keep watch, to prevent his com-

ing to me, he sent his devils to torment me. Your drugs gave sleep to my body but my spirit suffered. In the shadows —in the silence I could see my body lying there, while I—myself—was forced to listen to what They said—what They said!"

"The main thing was that you slept. Your reason was saved in spite of all he could do."

He had never let her see how perilous he knew those dreams of hers to be. He only marveled at the strong beautiful balance of her mind that retained its sanity in spite of them.

A BUMP at the door heralded the sturdy old housekeeper with a tea-tray. She was the only servant Sant had permitted to stay on since the ceremony he had witnessed in the chapel. He refused to expose two younger maids to the danger of Stephen's presence in the house, or, rather, to the satanic malice of the mind now in possession of Stephen's body.

"I'll go myself to let Mr. Lynn know that tea is ready," he told the old servant.

Mrs. Poldhu nodded. She was a rather formidable old woman, afraid of no one and given to expressing her opinions very forcibly indeed. She'd summed up Stephen as "the spit of that old toäd, his uncle Mark Zennor" and had flatly refused to speak or look at him.

"Plaze yourself, sir. Tesn't no consarn o' mine."

Sant left Rosaina setting out the tea-things. Hároon Er-Rasheed lay before the fire, bestowing passionate attention on one large paw which failed to meet his standards of cleanliness. Mrs. Poldhu waddled off to get more coal for the dying fire.

Sant searched the garden in vain. Satisfied that Stephen was no longer there, he hurried indoors again. He hadn't been in the least concerned about the tea question but had seen, from the window, that Stephen was warily approaching a gate on which a blackbird sang in the dusk. Sant didn't wish a repetition of a savage little incident he and Rosaina had witnessed yesterday when Stephen had revoltingly injured a dog that had snarled at him.

That was his voice! Sant hurried. The door of the study, where he'd left Rosaina, was open.

"Stand still, little fool!"

The words rang out.

"This is to punish you for locking me out at night. Now, you yellow beast—*jump!*"

Sant leaped to the door and was in time to see Hároon Er-Rasheed between Stephen's hands, his belly flattened to the ground, ears back, golden eyes black with terror. At the word "jump!" the animal shot forward as if from a gun.

Rosaina stood, white, agonized, unable to stir a muscle. Her shriek and Stephen's laugh synchronized with Sant's lightning dash. He caught up the yellow cat from the fire on which it crouched, its eyes glazed and fixed on Stephen's face.

The animal stubbornly resisted Sant. It fought to free itself, struggled furiously to obey the will of the mocking devil in Stephen's eyes. Sant held it in iron hands, and faced its tormenter.

"Mark Zennor!" his voice was barely a whisper. "You exceed your powers. Release this animal—I lay my command on you!"

In Stephen's eyes such cold blind hatred flared that Rosaina cried out again. But Sant moved nearer to his enemy, stared him between the eyes—stared until the dark fire in them was

quenched, until their lids drooped. In sullen obedience his hand brushed the big cat's head. He muttered a low-breathed word.

The Persian jumped half the width of the room, halted to turn eyes of blazing yellow fire on Stephen, dashed like a crazy thing through an open window, flashed across a lawn, up over a wall, and away.

Stephen also vanished from Rosaina's sight.

He went slowly, but his exit was even more spectacular than that of the unfortunate beast. Again she cried out in stark terror, for he disappeared without moving at all.

"He is here with us, Rosaina. He is perfectly visible to me. But you are, in part, subject to him. He has intoxicated your vision by a trick. *Will* yourself to see him—here, take my hand."

A touch of it, and she regained control. She saw Stephen walking toward the door.

SANT looked after him as he went from the room.

"He lost control too. I've tried for that revelation from the start. Oh, it was an infinitesimal moment of anger merely, but enough—enough to work on. He's at a disadvantage in his borrowed flesh."

Rosaina trembled, but with anger now, rather than fear.

"Adrian! Your poor cat—won't you go and look for him?"

Her indignation burned so fiercely that she couldn't fathom his apparent indifference. He gave her a long keen look.

"You are very angry. Good! It will stimulate you. But don't worry about Hároon. Mercifully he wasn't injured; the fire was almost out and his fur's thick. He'll forget when—when we've saved Stephen."

She was goaded to new activity. The shock of the beautiful friendly beast's punishment, remembrance of his glazed eyes fixed on Stephen's grinning face, and his shining yellow fur with gray smoke curling up about his body, stung her to fierce anger and revolt.

"You're right. He shall not take Stephen from me—he shall not! I'll fight, I'll fight to the end now. That poor cat's eyes—Stephen shall never... oh! I'm ready, Adrian! That devil shall not win!"

He knew her present condition could not last, but it all helped. Anger would die down, her mood of hot reckless indignation cool. Only staying-power counted. But this would strengthen her will. Everything turned finally on that.

"There's work for both of us to do before midnight. And I want to emphasize once more that it's very important you should go of your own free will tonight. I must remain here, working for you, helping to strengthen your will with my own. But it is Zennor's chosen Hour and I may not interfere with what he does. Don't evade Stephen. Offer yourself a free victim for the sacrifice. And concentrate ceaselessly, ceaselessly on your purpose to save Stephen."

"Yes! Yes!" she whispered, "I must hold him! Save him!"

"Hold him, save him," emphasized her companion. "And now there's no time to lose. You've got those books and papers? Good. Concentrate for your life—and his. No need to lock ourselves in tonight. Stephen will be at Lamorna House—until he comes for you."

He was at once absorbed, drawing strange symbols on ancient brittle papyri where faint tracery of lettering

showed. After examining these faint marks through a glass for minutes at a time, he repeated them aloud. At the last word—all he said being perfectly unintelligible to the girl—he would scratch a new sign on the papyrus under his hand with an alder twig which he kept charred at a naked flame on his desk.

He'd been at this for two days and two nights, slaving like a man possessed, muttering, writing, glaring at the dirty old papyri, transported to a world Rosaina couldn't conceive of.

She recollected the yellow Persian's queer interest in these literary labors, how he'd leaped up at the faint rustle of twig on paper when a new symbol had been drawn, how his eyes, their pupils distended to the edge of the iris, had followed the movements of some invisible moving thing about Sant's chair.

Poor beautiful Hároon! She bent to her task with tightened lips.

By slow degrees she became aware of her surroundings. When first Stephen led her to a throne-like seat, she could make out nothing in the pungent dusk. Now the great chapel was revealing itself; and, instructed by Adrian though she was, her heart stood still at the revelation.

Her throne was in the exact center of the great circular floor. Behind it, and on either side, curved the shining walls.

Before her stood the altar with its reredos which, from this distance, she saw only as a burning patch of light.

She scarcely glanced at the great dazzling globe of metal in midair, so afraid was she of its will-benumbing magic. She fixed her gaze, rather, on the man who moved to and fro before the altar in its refracted rays—going about his awful business.

Her chill, slender hands clasped the snakes' heads of polished ebony that formed two arms for her seat. The elaborate ritual that was to culminate in her death was begun. She recalled Adrian, shut up in his study, bent over his desk, concentrating on her, sending out his strong will to aid her own. Strengthened, steadied, she then deliberately thrust aside this mental image and gave her whole attention to Stephen and his profane and terrifying preparations.

Mark's sin-eater — Mark himself now, save for the thin veil of flesh that masked his hell-born vicious soul. It was Stephen's straight strong body there, kneeling at the altar. It was his dear hands, his dark head, his face and eyes and lips. Oh! it was everything—and it was nothing. The mad cruel smile, the eyes' wild glare, the towering merciless pride that blazed behind this fleshly screen were Mark's alone.

Mark's sin-eater. And how deep was every sin of the dead printed upon this face and body of Stephen Lynn! The voice that rang in deep imperious rhythm was altogether Mark's. Stephen's had been notably clear, eager, flexible, with a trick of rising inflection that she adored.

Ah! This was Mark! That he moved and spoke in Stephen's guise made him more awfully Mark Zennor. Not a glimpse of the real Stephen. Not a spark of his own ego burned in the temple of his body; its altar light was quenched and Mark's dark soul was in possession.

Rosaina's courage wavered. Suppose Adrian was wrong? Suppose Stephen could not, after all, return to his habitation of the flesh for the promised moment? Suppose she failed to

recognize the moment if it came? What had Adrian said?

"Stephen will come. He *must* come. Zennor may not offer sacrifice without first allowing Stephen to return momentarily to his own body once more. Beyond all question you will see him again in the flesh."

Fear drove hope away, rode her leaping thoughts.

"He is not here—the man I love is not here. This is a devil, a monster, it is Mark. He has tricked Stephen, destroyed him, thrust him down to hell—his eyes—Stephen's kind gentle eyes—that cat, how his eyes were held by Mark's! . . . Stephen's too, he must obey, torture himself, he is a slave—a slave like that animal! Stephen! But there *is* no Stephen—he has no body, no soul, he doesn't exist! Stephen!"

But love still struggled to believe.

"I must wait. One moment there will be, one brief moment! I shall meet him face to face in the living flesh. My dear! My beloved! And I will hold him fast—fast for ever. No one shall take him from me. He will come and I will hold him fast—fast——"

And now the chapel lights grew dim. The suspended dazzling globe of metal dulled to a pale moonglow. Black candles, tall watchful guardians about the altar-stone, bowed trembling heads of flame, bowed down to their sockets, wavered—died. Only the reredos still blazed, its restless secret fires more brilliant, more incandescent as globe and candles failed.

STEPHEN turned from the altar, advanced with stately purposeful deliberation, down the five steps, across the chapel floor. Now he stood before Rosaina and in his brilliant eyes she saw Mark's demon enthroned, triumphant.

"Come!" he commanded. "I am ready. You are chosen to share this Hour with me."

She felt his fingers close upon her own; their heat burned her, their cruel strength appalled. This was Mark, all Mark indeed. How well she knew that fierce hold, how her nerves shrank at its familiar possessiveness!

He led her to a thin, blood-red crescent of moon that gleamed in its first quarter on the marble floor. Vast eagles' wings outstretched in fiery lines behind the wicked knife-edge of the moon.

"Stand here."

Obediently she placed her feet upon the sign. She felt its poignant blade's sharp agony. The High Priest, hands of iron on her shoulders, faced her with rapt cruel face down-bent.

"Receive her, oh Prince and Ruler of the Air! This is the victim appointed to fulfil my Destiny. Before Time began I chose her from all the worlds that are. Her blood shall seal my vow."

She felt the beat of great wings; the air about her vibrated and fanned her coldly on the cheek, cold as the breath from mountain heights, cold to the heart it struck—but the High Priest's face of triumph chilled her very soul.

He led her to the east, where a half-moon showed—a fountain of living water rising beside it. Here again he dedicated her, calling on all the waters of the earth to witness his power.

By the three-quarter moon dark earth was strewn, and, standing here, she knew the smothering darkness of the grave. Only the unrelenting hand that guided her, the deep voice that pealed in trumpet-call, summoned her again from what seemed her tomb.

And now he set her feet upon the last ominous moon in whose full orb

moved that potent deadly cloud—soul of all that is—ageless—indestructible—accursed.

A brazier of fire stood close by. The High Priest drew a tiny phial from the folds of his robe, shook its powdered contents on the red coals. Flame leaped in a twisting clear blue pillar to the roof, spread across it, streamed down the walls again.

The High Priest's voice rolled in thrilling music above the elements' fierce roar:

"Rulers of Fire—above the earth, within the earth, about the earth!
Michael! Samael! Anael! Hear me now!
The appointed Hour is come! The Victim is prepared!
Receive my Sacrifice! Receive my Sacrifice! Receive my Sacrifice!"

As the third loud cry rang echoing round the chapel's flaming walls, one single spear of glittering white fire thrust upward from the cradle of its being—from the deadly ovoid cloud within the full red moon. The priest's hand closed swiftly about the fire-spear, bent it to brush Rosaina's forehead, released it with a muttered word. Instantly the spear vanished and all the fiery walls and roof grew dark once more.

Down to his knees sank the High Priest. His lips touched the red moon's rim. Three times he did obeisance, three times he murmured words of power. Then he rose and faced the victim.

Rosaina, at touch of the shining spear, felt deadly mortal chill invade her body—a sense of doom paralyzed every faculty.

It was too late to struggle, too late to fight! Stephen was lost! And she must die! She must let go—let go—let go. . . .

She stood watching the High Priest as he moved from her, up the five steps, up to the altar. He reached it, turned to face her, lifted his arms until his black silken cloak stretched like wings on either side of a scarlet sheath-like robe. Higher leaped the hellish lights behind the reredos. Before its strong pulsating evil, Stephen loomed dark and tall and terrible. He waited for her. He summoned her. She must obey—obey him.

From the caves of darkness that lined the walls between its broad squat pillars, shadows thrust and crowded, worshippers from hell, incorporeal, soundless, shapeless, fluid as water, bodiless as smoke, yet, beyond all words, instinct with power.

The High Priest's congregation was assembled. Rosaina the Victim was summoned. Cold and darkness below, above, on every side. She moved to the altar like driftwood borne on the ocean tide.

Now she was at the altar steps. Each one's ascent set her a world's width farther off from Stephen. Now she stood in the balefire glow of the altar-screen. The High Priest's hands lifted her, laid her on the altar-stone.

At last she saw the figures on the gleaming quivering reredos, saw herself in the bound victim there, saw Stephen in the High Priest who stood beside the sacrificial stone. And behind the veils of the Four about the altar, she recognized the lewd companions of her dream.

A swift pang of longing tore her for Adrian's help. How sure he had been! How utterly she had believed that Stephen—Stephen himself—would return if only for an instant. Now, turning to the wickedly intent face bent over her she saw Mark, and Mark alone.

Stephen was lost — for ever lost. And she must die and go out in the darkness too.

Thin biting cords were bound about her. A knife-blade winked and flashed. Now indeed the end was come. Her eyes stared up into the face bent over hers.

Sudden rending pain stung her failing senses. A veil seemed snatched from before her eyes. Her heart's slow beat quickened to furious pulsing life. Nerve and muscle strained to break the bonds that held her.

"Stephen! Stephen! Stephen!"

Her voice rang through the gloom. The black smooth walls seemed to quiver in response. All the hurtling swarming shadows jostled closer.

"Stephen! Stephen!"

Again the dark walls trembled. Closer pressed the demon shadows.

"Stephen! Come to me! Come to me!"

The High Priest's face bent lower. Dark eyes looked into her own. A faint urgent whisper reached her ears.

"I have come . . . from hell . . . to you. Hold me! Save me!"

"Stephen!" she cried again. "Ah, this is you indeed! Your eyes that look at me. Stephen! I will hold you. I will save you. Keep your eyes on mine. I will never, never let you go!"

And now she died a thousand deaths. Delusion hurled her from world to world through awful space. Fire burned her flesh from her charred bones. Water drowned her beneath dark mountainous waves. Heavy earth buried her in earthquake shocks. But in flame and rushing water, under the earth or above it in the illimitable aching kingdoms of the air, she saw one thing clearly. She saw the face of Stephen Lynn. Nothing—nothing else.

Fighting, struggling, holding the gates of her will fast locked against Mark's vicious power, she felt a hand in hers. It was Adrian's strong clasp. Adrian's voice spoke across the roar of fire and tumult of water, of crashing rocks and howling winds.

"The Hour is about to strike. Hold fast, hold fast!"

Stephen's face grew clearer. Its look altered. He was smiling down at her. She could feel his warm breath. His strong gentle hands released her from her bonds. His voice spoke, assuring her of safety. His arms enfolded her as she sank, faint with rapture . . . the world about her fading. . . .

* * * * *

"But Adrian! You did come to me!" she protested. "I saw you, heard you, felt your hand in mine."

"Probably. All of me that really *is* me. But my body didn't move from this room, this table, this chair you see before you."

Rosaina looked round the room. Sun streamed in from open windows. A blackbird's exquisite liquid song opened the very gates of heaven to its listeners. She turned to Stephen once more.

He put out a hand to touch her own.

"Yes! Still here, darling."

"I can't—I can't believe it. The three of us together at last—safe—happy—free! Free!"

"And Mark——" she shuddered. "Tell me, Adrian, I want to know before we forget him—utterly. What happened—what does our freedom mean—to *him?*"

Sant put out a quick warning hand. His answer came muffled, almost a whisper:

"Forget, forget, Rosaina! His dark soul is in bondage. It is not safe, even in thought, to follow him now."

Stephen's arm drew her to him. His eyes adored her.

"Rose, golden Rose! Remember only that we are happy—free—at last."

We two will stand beside that shrine,
Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps are stirred continually
With prayer sent up to God;
And see our old prayers, granted, melt
Each like a little cloud.
—ROSSETTI, *The Blessed Damozel.*

She could remember it perfectly; Spencer clawing at the rock like a terrified spider.

The Snowman

By LORETTA BURROUGH

Her first husband lay at the bottom of a deep crevasse in a Swiss glacier—but why should a snow image in his likeness strike her with such eery terror?

PHILIP'S lodge was enchantingly complete, like a perfect little doll's house set down in a wilderness. Outside, a marching pile of snowy hills, dotted far away with pale roofs; inside, small warm polished rooms with everything ready to your hand.

Nancy, examining her face in the mirror above the bureau, reflected that she had looked thirty when she had married Phil a few days ago, but now she was her proper age, twenty. Three days of Philip's love had searched out and swept clean those dark desperate places in her where Spencer, her first husband, had left his spoiler's mark. For a moment, she looked into the

mirror almost as though she expected to see Spencer's lean olive face beside hers, faintly mocking, tasting a cruel pleasure. He had been much too old for her; there had been in him no kindness, no joy.

Shying violently away from thought of him, she went to the wide windows that cornered the bedroom. She could hear Philip downstairs in the living-room — a snatch of tune whistled sharply, thumps and rustles, as he unpacked the books they had brought with them this afternoon. She leaned upon the window-sill, peering out beyond the frosty panes to the violet-shadowed landscape.

Then suddenly, she called. "Philip! Oh, Phil!"

She must have been hugged as close in his thoughts as he had been in hers, because he answered at once, "Coming, Nancy."

"Philip," she said, when he walked into the room, "what is that odd thing up there on the hill? I'm sure I didn't notice it when we drove in this afternoon."

He came closer to her, gently taking her waist between his hands, and leaning across her shoulder.

"What odd thing? Oh, I see."

Whatever it was, it had the most curious air of inexact mystery about it, probably because it stood in the shadow of a snow-bowed larch, and the landscape was already half submerged in night.

All that Nancy could truly discern was a kind of gleaming through the dark, and an outstretched arm that seemed to point directly at the house. And the figure's brooding poise held something that plucked very faintly and lightly at memory. It was quite a distance from the house, almost at the very tip of the hill that seemed to be delicately taking flight into the shadowy sky.

"Why, it's a snowman," Philip said. "Quite a good one, isn't it? Like a real man."

"Of course it's a snowman—how odd I didn't know that at once! I wonder who made it? I thought you said we hadn't any neighbors." Nancy remained at the window, attempting to disentangle that elusive skein of remembrance.

"No more we have, thank God. What's a honeymoon in the lap of neighbors? But I daresay some children walked a few miles for the excitement of trespassing." He looked at her closely. "Nancy, if you don't like it, I'll go out and kick it down."

Nancy was startled again by his nearness to her; he had read her thoughts, known at once that there was something about the distant white figure which she found displeasing. "Oh, no," she said. "It's really quite a pretty thing."

"It *is* clever. I think I'll go out and have a look at it. Want to come?"

"No, I believe I'll start dinner." Philip had wanted to bring a maid with them, but Nancy had preferred to have their perfect two weeks in his lodge, alone. It would be soon enough that they would have to go back to New York and begin a household and responsibilities.

She watched him when he was out of the house, taking the snowy hill in young nimble strides, his overcoat flapping open from his limber body. Her heart seemed to follow him up the white path, part of Philip. And knowing that being married to him had rescued her life, her sanity, she saw him approach the snowman; he was slapping his gloved hands together as though it was cold, and the steam of

his breathing wreathed his head. It was when she saw their meeting, the man of flesh and the man of snow, that she caught that half-vanished slippery memory that had troubled her before; now, as though full-bodied, it plunged violently into her hands.

She sat down suddenly in the cretonne-covered easy-chair, because the hinges of her knees had loosened. How many times had she seen *Spencer* stand just as the snowman stood, his weight thrown to one foot, his arm pointing out something at a distance to her, his head pointing too, perhaps to a distant blue-white peak, or to a chalet perched like a bird's nest on a Swiss mountainside? But that had been his clumsy curious way; whoever had made the snowman had caught it exactly, by some unhappy mischance, as though he had worked from a blueprint.

After a few minutes, she got up again and went downstairs, wanting the stability of familiar simple tasks. She would be an absurd little fool to be troubled by a child's fumbled statue, just because it happened to resemble in an accidental gesture, a dead man. Her thoughts worried and confused, she drew close the figured curtains in the living-room and began to prepare their simple meal. Philip, when he came in, was rosy, breathing out cold frozen air.

"He's an elegant snowman," he said. "With bits of coal for chest buttons, and a charming pipe—I'm half inclined to take it out of his mouth and use it myself."

"Oh, I wouldn't touch it," she said quickly. "After all, the children might come back and want it. You're cold, Philip."

"Not now." He had taken her into his arms. The fire on the hearth hissed softly, sleepily.

"Philip," she said, "you will always love me? Nothing will ever turn you from me?"

"Does a man turn from himself?" he said, his eyes serious. "That is it now—you're part of me. Is something troubling you, Nancy? I think sometimes"— his voice sharpened —"that I can never free you from what he did to you—like someone who had recovered from a wound but will never lose the scars."

"Oh, foolish—" she said, feeling the darkness and the cold retreating from about her. She was safe now; she must always remember that. "You've almost cured me, darling. Give me just a little longer to forget entirely."

THEY climbed up the hard-frozen path together in the darkness, Philip's gloved hand snug about hers. Ahead of them, the solitary light they had left in the house beckoned warmly. They had been dining with friends of Philip's in New York, amusing nice friends, but it seemed good to Nancy for them to be coming home together now. Philip's spotlight laid a neat round circle on the frost-touched ruts in the path.

"Snow coming," he said quietly, his voice floating back to her.

She thought that she too could smell in the air the smoky wet sweetness that meant snow. "How nice!" she said, ending it in a soft yawn. That would mean tomorrow just she and Philip shut in together, no callers, only themselves, enough for a whole world. She fumbled in the depths of her bag for the keys she could hear tinkling there as their feet rang upon the cold stones before the door. Philip was idly swishing the pale nub of light about on the hillside, picking forth tree and bush and snow-crusted rock that looked unfamiliar in the faint illumination.

"Hello," he said suddenly. "The sculptors have been at work again! They've moved their snowman.

Her glance followed the direction of his up the slope. "So they have," she cried, her voice odd.

The snowman was fully ten feet nearer the house, standing boldly on a small knoll, its frozen coat aglitter from the dark. It seemed to Nancy, brought forward into prominence as it was, its skinny arm pointing straight at the house, to have achieved a curious air of menace. And she was again disturbed by its haunting resemblance.

She turned quickly to Philip. "Why *should* they have moved it—it seems such a stupid thing to do. And why do they pick *our* back yard to play in, when they have a whole world of snow?"

She could feel Philip looking at her. "Curiosity, I suppose. If it bothers you, I'll watch tomorrow and chase them, little pests."

"It doesn't bother me exactly—but it's queer. Let's see if it's moved in the morning—it's on that knoll now, right beside the pine."

"It couldn't have moved in the morning," he said gently. "That's a little fanciful, Nancy darling."

His hand caught up hers, and they went into the house together. But the edge of its welcome had been taken off for her. Somewhere in her mind was a thought she did not care to recognize, that there was something very queer about the snowman. And whether it gave it undue importance or not, she resolved that she would have Philip kick the thing down tomorrow, and rescue her from its unblinking patient regard.

In the night Nancy awakened to hear snow hissing softly among the bare branches about the house, and tapping on the window panes. It seemed to her drowsy and sleep-filled mind an intolerably lonely and desolate sound, and she huddled closer to Philip's warm unconscious body, her eyes for a little while wide open and fixed upon the darkness of the cold room.

When morning came, their bedroom bloomed with the pale light of the snow, a tumult of flakes riding the wind. When they kissed each other, the very taste of the snow in the air was soft on their lips. They dressed quickly and went to the windows together.

"It will keep up all day," Philip said, his hands spread wide on the sill. "Lovely! No callers to congratulate the newly wed."

Her eyes followed the dark outline of his face, that face which the first time she had seen it had seemed to call her clearly as though he had said her name. "Yes, darling," she said contentedly, and then looked out again at the near slate sky faintly visible above the falling flakes, and at the deep-piled white hillside.

Suddenly, her fingers caught hold of his warm wrist. "There were, surely," she said, her tongue clumsy, "*no* children here last night, between two o'clock and now!" She left it there between them, unanswerable, for Philip to explain. "There are no footprints around it, Philip. Last night when we came in, it was on the knoll beside the pine. Oh, Philip!"

"Hush, darling," he said, his eyes searching the snowman, a puzzled frown hatched across his forehead.

It was so close that she could see the bits of coal that made the buttons on its bulbous chest. Fully twenty feet above loomed the empty knoll where it had stood last night, the pine's snow-crested branches leaning heavily. The

figure was freshly touched with snow; the pointing arm had thickened all along its length, and on the pipe clamped tight in the white mouth, a little disfiguring hat of snow had formed.

"It's some mischief," Philip said quietly at last. "Somebody's idea of a good joke. What else could it be?" He looked at her, taking her shoulders between his hands. "Supernatural? You know, darling, that's utterly absurd!"

Even looking back into Philip's clean sane eyes, her fears did not shrivel; they only hid behind her words. "Of course," she said weakly. "An isolated farming community like this—must have its quota of halfwits. It's somebody's idea of fun." But she got no feeling of fun from the empty hillside dominated by the queer misshapen figure. Only thirty feet or so from the house, it still maintained its intolerable resemblance. So many times had she seen Spencer stand in just that fashion, pipe pinched tight between his jaws, weight thrown to one side, head also to one side!

"Philip," she said, looking away from the drifting snow, "will you go out and kick it down? I'm sick of it." Before—she hardly phrased it to herself—it could come any closer.

"I think that's really giving it too much importance," he said quietly, "but if you want——"

"I do want." She wanted more than anything else, to see an innocent hillside again. "Perhaps you had better take an ax. It's probably frozen quite hard."

"All right then," he said, with a sudden effort at lightness, as though he were worried about her and did not want to show it. "This will be a blow to our self-appointed humorist."

She went downstairs with him and watched from the window as he climbed the hillside, his big shoulders already thickening with snow, the ax swinging lightly in his hand. The windy rattle of the casements was in her ears as she saw his figure appearing and disappearing in flooding veils of snow.

Unaware of the gesture, Nancy put her hand up to her throat as he approached the figure. He stood opposite it a moment, examining it, hefting the ax. And then the ax, swung heavily in his hands, cut off the snowman's head, sent it flying ponderously away. In a few minutes, there was nothing left but clumsy chunks of snow scattered here and there, each of which Philip followed up methodically and chopped and trampled into powder. Nancy, at the window, took a deep breath and went into the kitchen. It was gone. It would be hunched upon the hill no longer, to startle her looking out.

When Philip shucked his overcoat, he came into the kitchen where Nancy was measuring out coffee into the drip pot. The blue kettle already hissed upon the stove.

"Our snowman is defunct," he said, rubbing his hands. "However, I saved his pipe. Obliged to. It's much too good to throw away." He took it from his pocket and turned it in his fingers admiringly, wiping it dry with a handkerchief. "Isn't that a honey?" He held it out to her.

"Um——" she said absently, carefully spooning eggs into a pot of boiling water, and then glanced at it to please him. It *was* rather a nice pipe, wasn't it? Far too good for a snowman's cold lips. Where had she seen one like it before? Puzzled, she took it from his hand.

Suddenly, the kitchen began to spin about her in large black circles, roaring circles of darkness and sound. Philip caught her as she fell.

When she opened her eyes, her face was wet; his sopping handkerchief was held to her forehead. "I'm all right," she said weakly.

Philip's white worried face hung above her; to her whirling brain, it seemed as big as a moon. And then she felt his arm lifting her as he carried her inside to the couch in the living-room, and covered her with a woolen throw.

"Better?" he said, sitting down beside her, massaging her cold hands in his warm fingers. "I'll have some hot coffee for you in a moment. What happened, Nancy?"

For a moment, she could not remember; she could only remember her legs turning to straw under her, and her body going down into roaring waves.

And then suddenly, as though something had touched her and said, "Think, Nancy," she remembered.

Philip leaned down beside her. "There is nothing to be afraid of. What is it, darling? Tell me!"

The words came out in a prolonged half-senseless flood, from where they had been waiting, green-scummed, stagnant, for a year. "That pipe—the snowman's—that was Spencer's pipe. I've seen it a million times, Philip. It has his initial on it, S. R. And there's a little crack——" She paused. "I remember when it split and he had it mended. It's his—but it couldn't be! Because it's down a crevasse in Switzerland, with him. And the men told me nobody had ever gone to the bottom of that crevasse—nobody could." She lay looking up into his dark worried eyes. "It couldn't come up out of that crevasse. Philip, Spencer's death wasn't an *accident*."

Philip's eyes changed suddenly, as though behind them a strange and disturbing thought had come. "What do you mean, Nancy?" he said sharply. "You're talking nonsense. You're ill."

"No—no. You promised me nothing would ever make any difference to your love." The scene she was about to tell gathered force, pictured itself for her as it had a thousand times since it had happened, so that it was hardly any effort to put it into speech. "That day it happened—that morning—I had asked him for a divorce. I told him I wanted to marry you. He refused—he made jokes. You never met him—you can't know how cruel and filthy he could be when he wanted to. He called me a——"

Nancy's head was aching, a deep thundering throb in her skull. "That morning we went climbing, just the two of us. He liked it that way—we were both very good at it. And we were going up a bad place, roped together, and he said suddenly—I was ahead of him— 'This would be a nasty place for you to get careless.' And I turned around and he was looking up at me. His eyes seemed to get scared. If he hadn't been afraid, I wouldn't have thought of it. I was up there safe on the ledge, with the rope braced around a rock, and there he was climbing, at a very bad spot, where he needed the help of the rope." The clean biting air seemed to come back to her, apple-green, cold, and that instant of blinding temptation. "If I hadn't thought of what it would mean with him gone, and we free to marry, it still wouldn't have happened. But thinking of that seemed to break down my will. And I never looked at him again, but I took out my knife——"

She hadn't looked at him again, but she could remember it perfectly: Spencer, clawing at the rock like a terrified spider, his whitening jaws clamped tight around the stem of his pipe, as he clawed there without a word, seeking frantically for a foothold. She went on, "And I cut the rope with my knife, and he went down." Like a bird that had been shot, turning over and over in the still air without a sound, the pipe still clamped tight in his mouth.

The little Swiss papers had headlined it, *Terrible Climbing Accident.* And the men had assured her sorrowfully that she would never see her husband again; no one could ever plumb the depths of the black gaping crack into which he had fallen.

Spencer's pipe, she thought numbly, must be at the bottom of that crevasse, deep where no one could ever reach it or Spencer. And yet a few moments ago, she had held the pipe in her hand; she knew it had been there, the bowl in her palm, ice-cold and repellent.

She closed her eyes. And then she felt Philip's fingers gentle on her face.

"Poor Nancy!" he said. "That is a terrible thing to have carried alone for a year."

She looked up at him. "You must hate me, Philip." Hate her for having fouled their shining relationship.

"Hate you? How many times do you think I killed him in my heart?" He took her hand in his. "And was it murder? Was it a long-planned ugly thing? Didn't it happen in the flash of a moment, because he had pushed you over the brink of torture?" He leaned down and kissed her. "Nancy, don't worry any more."

In a little while, they set about getting their breakfast. It was when they were carrying the coffee and fruit into the table that Nancy said suddenly, fright pinching cold about her heart again, "But Philip! That pipe—where *could* it have come from?"

"Whoever made the snowman," he said quietly, "also happened to have a pipe that looked like Spencer's. 'S. R.' could stand for anything under the sun, Nancy. 'Samuel Ridgley,' 'Solomon Rivers,' but not 'Spencer Rogers.' Now let's stop thinking and talking about a tiresome and unpleasant joke. And we'll never think again, Nancy, about what you told me just now." He picked up the pipe and tossed it into the fire.

"Never," she said. Of course Philip was right! A chance resemblance, that was all. S. R. *could* stand for almost anyone's name. And she need never think again of that icy wind-swept Switzerland mountain. She had told it. It was confessed.

The snowman was kicked down, and she had seen Philip throw his pipe into the fire. A deep feeling of relief in her heart, she looked out at the hillside, innocent and empty in the falling snow. There was nothing of the snowman left at all.

THE snow deepened and deepened through the day, heaping the house and the hillside in thickening white drifts; Nancy felt that it closed her into a happiness that she had never known. She had told the horror that had tormented her for a year like black wings hovering above her head; she felt clean-swept and free. And it had not torn Philip from her—it seemed as though it had tightened the bond between them, made it everlastingly secure.

They had had dinner. Philip was yawning over a brief he worked on, now and then glancing up at her with

his slow warming smile. Nancy, looking at the dying fire, saw that it wanted mending.

"We need more logs," she said. "No —don't get up, Phil. I'd like some fresh air."

She put on a coat and went out. The wind had died and the snow fell silently as feathers from the night. She picked up an armful of the small split logs and stood there, looking about, flakes lodging gently in her eyelashes. And then the logs tumbled from her arms into the deep snow with a smothered thunder.

Gasping Philip's name, her hands groping frantically for the knob of the closed door, she got the door open somehow, and locked and bolted it behind her. She faced the bright light of the living-room, her mouth opening and closing without any words.

Philip leaped from his chair. "Nancy, what is it! What's wrong!"

He grasped her trembling hands, and held them still.

"Philip——" She clutched at those warm firm hands as though they were all that kept her from drowning in terror. "The snowman—out there on the path!" So close to the house now that its ice-cold arm all but touched the windows.

With a muttered curse, dragging her with him because she would not let go his hands, Philip ran to the window and thrust the curtain aside.

The white stare of the snowman peered in at them.

He swept the curtains shut again. His face was very pale, but his jaw jutted suddenly, angrily.

"That settles it," he cried; "we go back to New York tonight." His eyes searched hers. "Don't be afraid. It can't harm you—it's only snow—it's——" He found no more words.

She felt herself being pulled from the room. Her legs were like straws under her; she could not think, or move of her own will. All that she knew was that now retribution was coming and Philip could not stop it for her.

"No use, Philip. No use," she repeated over and over. But she let him take her with him up the stairs, trembled beside him as he packed their bags hastily, leaving bureau drawers gaping, forgetting things, his look coming back to her constantly, stricken with anxiety for her.

He took the bags in one hand, and pushed the electric light switch. White swaying snow-shadows spilled into the room, soft upon the walls; like little clocks, snow ticked against the windows. His other hand caught hers.

"Nancy!" he said imploringly.

She stumbled after him out into the dim hall. She could not feel his fingers knotted about hers; a great hard cold seemed to be creeping upward toward her heart. They went down the dark stairs, the bags bumping clumsily against the wall.

And then, upon the lower landing, they were stricken into stillness, motionless, dumb. Through the house had sounded hollowly, like a measured angry drum-beat, a knocking on the panels of the front door. Like a terrified beast, she clung to Philip, her eyes growing wide, her mouth dry as ashes.

The knocking came again, thunderous; the small house deep in snow shook with it.

Hysteria spilled into her brain, welling like dark flood waters. She sank from Philip's hand, slid into a corner of the wall.

"Open the door!" she cried, covering her eyes, groveling against the wall. "Open the door! The snowman wants to come in!"

They crawl up from hell night after night.

Beetles

By ROBERT BLOCH

A tale of the ghastly fate that befell an archeologist who stole an Egyptian mummy that was protected by the sacred Scarab

WHEN Hartley returned from Egypt, his friends said he had changed. The specific nature of that change was difficult to detect, for none of his acquaintances got more than a casual glimpse of him. He dropped around to the club just once, and then retired to the seclusion of his apartments. His manner was so definitely hostile, so markedly anti-

social, that very few of his cronies cared to visit him, and the occasional callers were not received.

It caused considerable talk at the time—gossip rather. Those who remembered Arthur Hartley in the days before his expedition abroad were naturally quite cut up over the drastic metamorphosis in his manner. Hartley had been known as a keen scholar, a singularly erudite field-worker in his chosen profession of archeology; but at the same time he had been a peculiarly charming person. He had the worldly flair usually associated with the fictional characters of E. Phillips Oppenheim, and a positively devilish sense of humor which mocked and belittled it. He was the kind of fellow who could order the precise wine at the proper moment, at the same time grinning as though he were as much surprised by it all as his guest of the evening. And most of his friends found this air of culture without ostentation quite engaging. He had carried this urbane sense of the ridiculous over into his work; and while it was known that he was very much interested in archeology, and a notable figure in the field, he inevitably referred to his studies as "pottering around with old fossils and the old fossils that discover them."

Consequently, his curious reversal following his trip came as a complete surprise.

All that was definitely known was that he had spent some eight months on a field trip to the Egyptian Sudan. Upon his return he had immediately severed all connections with the institute he had been associated with. Just what had occurred during the expedition was a matter of excited conjecture among his former intimates. But something had definitely happened; it was unmistakable.

The night he spent at the club proved that. He had come in quietly; too quietly. Hartley was one of those persons who usually made an entrance, in the true sense of the word. His tall, graceful figure, attired in the immaculate evening dress so seldom found outside of the pages of melodramatic fiction; his truly leonine head with its Stokowski-like bristle of gray hair; these attributes commanded attention. He could have passed anywhere as a man of the world, or a stage magician awaiting his cue to step on the platform.

But this evening he had entered quietly, unobtrusively. He wore dinner clothes, but his shoulders sagged, and the spring was gone from his walk. His hair was grayer, and it hung pallidly over his tanned forehead. Despite the bronze of Egyptian sun on his features, there was a sickly tinge to his countenance. His eyes peered mistily from amidst unsightly folds. His face seemed to have lost its mold; the mouth hung loosely.

He greeted no one; and took a table alone. Of course cronies came up and chatted, but he did not invite them to join him. And oddly enough, none of them insisted, although normally they would gladly have forced their company upon him and jollied him out of a black mood, which experience had taught them was easily done in his case. Nevertheless, after a few words with Hartley, they all turned away.

They must have felt it even then. Some of them hazarded the opinion that Hartley was still suffering from some form of fever contracted in Egypt, but I do not think they believed this in their hearts. From their shocked descriptions of the man they seemed one and all to sense the peculiar *alien* quality about him. This was an Arthur Hartley they had never known, an aged

stranger, with a querulous voice which rose in suspicion when he was questioned about his journey. Stranger he truly was, for he did not even appear to recognize some of the men who greeted him, and when he did it was with an abstracted manner—a clumsy way of wording it, but what else is there to say when an old friend stares blankly into silence upon meeting, and his eyes seem to fasten on far-off terrors that affright him?

That was the strangeness they all grasped in Hartley. He was afraid. Fear bestrode those sagging shoulders. Fear breathed a pallor into that ashy face. Fear grinned into those empty, far-fixed eyes. Fear prompted the suspicion in the voice.

They told me, and that is why I went round to see Arthur Hartley in his rooms. Others had spoken of their efforts, in the week following his appearance at the club, to gain admittance to his apartment. They said he did not answer the bell, and complained that the phone had been disconnected. But that, I reasoned, was fear's work.

I WOULDN'T let Hartley down. I had been a rather good friend of his—and I may as well confess that I scented a mystery here. The combination proved irresistible. I went up to his flat one afternoon and rang.

No answer. I went into the dim hallway and listened for footsteps, some sign of life from within. No answer. Complete, utter silence. For a moment I thought crazily of suicide, then laughed the dread away. It was absurd—and still, there had been a certain dismaying unanimity in all the reports I had heard of Hartley's mental state. When the stolidest, most hard-headed of the club bores concurred in their estimate of the man's condition, I might well worry. Still, suicide . . .

I rang again, more as a gesture than in expectation of tangible results, and then I turned and descended the stairs. I felt, I recall, a little twinge of inexplicable relief upon leaving the place. The thought of suicide in that gloomy hallway had not been pleasant.

I reached the lower door and opened it, and a familiar figure scurried past me on the landing. I turned. It was Hartley.

For the first time since his return I got a look at the man, and in the hallway shadows he was ghastly. Whatever his condition at the club, a week must have accentuated it tremendously. His head was lowered, and as I greeted him he looked up. His eyes gave me a terrific shock. There was a stranger dwelling in their depths—a haunted stranger. I swear he shook when I addressed him.

He was wearing a tattered topcoat, but it hung loosely over his gauntness. I noticed that he was carrying a large bundle done up in brown paper.

I said something, I don't remember what; at any rate, I was at some pains to conceal my confusion as I greeted him. I was rather insistently cordial, I believe, for I could see that he would just as soon have hurried up the stairs without even speaking to me. The astonishment I felt converted itself into heartiness. Rather reluctantly he invited me up.

We entered the flat, and I noticed that Hartley double-locked the door behind him. That, to me, characterized his metamorphosis. In the old days, Hartley had always kept open house, in the literal sense of the word. Studies might have kept him late at the institute, but a chance visitor found his door open wide. And now, he double-locked it.

I turned around and surveyed the apartment. Just what I expected to see I cannot say, but certainly my mind was prepared for some sign of radical alteration. There was none. The furniture had not been moved; the pictures hung in their original places; the vast bookcases still stood in the shadows.

Hartley excused himself, entered the bedroom, and presently emerged after discarding his topcoat. Before he sat down he walked over to the mantel and struck a match before a little bronze figurine of Horus. A second later the thick gray spirals of smoke arose in the approved style of exotic fiction, and I smelt the pungent tang of strong incense.

That was the first puzzler. I had unconsciously adopted the attitude of a detective looking for clues—or, perhaps, a psychiatrist ferreting out psychoneurotic tendencies. And the incense was definitely alien to the Arthur Hartley I knew.

"Clears away the smell," he remarked.

I didn't ask "What smell?" Nor did I begin to question him as to his trip, his inexplicable conduct in not answering my correspondence after he left Khartoum, or his avoidance of my company in this week following his return. Instead, I let him talk.

He said nothing at first. His conversation rambled, and behind it all I sensed the abstraction I had been warned about. He spoke of having given up his work, and hinted that he might leave the city shortly and go up to his family home in the country. He had been ill. He was disappointed in Egyptology, and its limitations. He hated darkness. The locust plagues had increased in Kansas.

This rambling was—insane.

I knew it then, and I hugged the thought to me in the perverse delight which is born of dread. Hartley was mad. "Limitations" of Egyptology. "I hate the dark." "The locusts of Kansas."

But I sat silently when he lighted the great candles about the room; sat silently staring through the incense clouds to where the flaming tapers illuminated his twitching features. And then he broke.

"You are my friend?" he said. There was a question in his voice, a puzzled suspicion in his words that brought sudden pity to me. His derangement was terrible to witness. Still, I nodded gravely.

"You are my friend," he continued. This time the words were a statement. The deep breath which followed betokened resolution on his part.

"Do you know what was in that bundle I brought in?" he asked suddenly.

"No."

"I'll tell you. Insecticide. That's what it was. Insecticide!"

His eyes flamed in triumph which stabbed me.

"I haven't left this house for a week. I dare not spread the plague. They follow me, you know. But today I thought of the way—absurdly simple, too. I went out and bought insecticide. Pounds of it. And liquid spray. Special formula stuff, more deadly than arsenic. Just elementary science, really—but its very prosaicness may defeat the Powers of Evil."

I NODDED like a fool, wondering whether I could arrange for him to be taken away that evening. Perhaps my friend, Doctor Sherman, might diagnose. . . .

"Now let them come! It's my last chance—the incense doesn't work, and

even if I keep the lights burning they creep about the corners. Funny the woodwork holds up; it should be riddled."

What was this?

"But I forgot," said Hartley. "You don't know about it. The plague, I mean. And the curse." He leaned forward and his white hands made octopus-shadows on the wall.

"I used to laugh at it, you know," he said. "Archeology isn't exactly a pursuit for the superstitious. Too much groveling in ruins. And putting curses on old pottery and battered statues never seemed important to me. But Egyptology—that's different. It's human bodies, there. Mummified, but still human. And the Egyptians were a great race—they had scientific secrets we haven't yet fathomed, and of course we cannot even begin to approach their concepts in mysticism."

Ah! There was the key! I listened, intently.

"I learned a lot, this last trip. We were after the excavation job in the new tombs up the river. I brushed up on the dynastic period, and naturally the religious significance entered into it. Oh, I know all the myths—the Bubastis legend, the Isis resurrection theory, the true names of Ra, the allegory of Set——"

His voice was a drone that frightened me.

"We found things there, in the tombs—wonderful things. The pottery, the furniture, the bas-reliefs we were able to remove. But the expeditionary reports will be out soon; you can read of it then. We found mummies, too. Cursed mummies."

Now I saw it, or thought I did.

"And I was a fool. I did something I never should have dared to do—for ethical reasons, and for other, more important reasons. Reasons that may cost me my soul."

I had to keep my grip on myself, remember that he was mad, remember that his convincing tones were prompted by the delusions of insanity. Or else, in that dark room I might have easily believed that there was a power which had driven my friend to this haggard brink.

"Yes, I did it, I tell you! I read the Curse of the Scarabæus—sacred beetle, you know—and I did it anyway. I couldn't guess that it was true. I was a skeptic; everyone is skeptical enough until things happen. Those things are like the phenomenon of death; you read about it, realize that it occurs to others, and yet cannot quite conceive of it happening to yourself. And yet it does. The Curse of the Scarabæus was like that."

Thoughts of the Sacred Beetle of Egypt crossed my mind. And I remember, also, the seven plagues. And I knew what he would say. . . .

"We came back. On the ship I noticed them. They crawled out of the corners every night. When I turned the light on they went away, but they always returned when I tried to sleep. I burned incense to keep them off, and then I moved into a new cabin. But they followed me.

"I did not dare tell anyone. Most of the chaps would have laughed, and the Egyptologists in the party wouldn't have helped much. Besides, I couldn't confess my crime. So I went on alone."

His voice was a dry whisper.

"It was pure hell. One night on the boat I saw the black things crawling in my food. After that I ate in the cabin, alone. I dared not see anyone now, for fear they might notice how the things followed me. They did follow me, you know—if I walked in shadow on the

deck they crept along behind. Only the sun kept them back, or a pure flame. I nearly went mad trying to account logically for their presence; trying to imagine how they got on the boat. But all the time I knew in my heart what the truth was. They were a sending—the Curse!

"When I reached port I went up and resigned. When my guilt was discovered there would have been a scandal, anyway, so I resigned. I couldn't hope to continue work with those things crawling all over, wherever I went. I was afraid to look anyone up. Naturally, I tried. That one night at the club was ghastly, though—I could see them marching across the carpet and crawling up the sides of my chair, and it took all there was in me to keep from screaming and dashing out.

"Since then I've stayed here, alone. Before I decide on any course for the future, I must fight the Curse and win. Nothing else will help."

I started to interject a phrase, but he brushed it aside and continued desperately.

"No, I couldn't go away. They followed me across the ocean; they haunt me in the streets. I could be locked up and they would still come. They come every night and crawl up the sides of my bed and try to get at my face and I must sleep soon or I'll go mad, they crawl over my face at night, they crawl——"

It was horrible to see the words ooze out between his set teeth, for he was fighting madly to control himself.

"Perhaps the insecticide will kill them. It was the first thing I should have thought of, but of course panic confused me. Yes, I put my trust in the insecticide. Grotesque, isn't it? Fighting an ancient curse with insect-powder?"

I spoke at last. "They're beetles, aren't they?"

He nodded. "Scarabæus beetles. You know the curse. The mummies under the protection of the Scarab cannot be violated."

I knew the curse. It was one of the oldest known to history. Like all legends, it has had a persistent life. Perhaps I could reason.

"But why should it affect you?" I asked. Yes, I would reason with Hartley. Egyptian fever had deranged him, and the colorful curse story had gripped his mind. If I spoke logically, I might get him to understand his hallucination. "Why should it affect you?" I repeated.

He was silent for a moment before he spoke, and then his words seemed to be wrung out of him.

"I stole a mummy," he said. "I stole the mummy of a temple virgin. I must have been crazy to do it; something happens to you under that sun. There was gold in the case, and jewels, and ornaments. And there was the Curse, written. I got them—both."

I stared at him, and knew that in this he spoke the truth.

"That's why I cannot keep up my work. I stole the mummy, and I am cursed. I didn't believe, but the crawling things came just as the inscription said.

"At first I thought that was the meaning of the Curse, that wherever I went the beetles would go, too, that they would haunt me and keep me from men for ever. But lately I am beginning to think differently. I think the beetles will act as messengers of vengeance. I think they mean to kill me."

This was pure raving.

"I haven't dared open the mummy-case since. I'm afraid to read the inscription again. I have it here in the

house, but I've locked it up and I won't show you. I want to burn it—but I must keep it on hand. In a way, it's the only proof of my sanity. And if the things kill me——"

"Snap out of it," I commanded. Then I started. I don't know the exact words I used, but I said reassuring, hearty, wholesome things. And when I finished he smiled the martyred smile of the obsessed.

"Delusions? They're real. But where do they come from? I can't find any cracks in the woodwork. The walls are sound. And yet every night the beetles come and crawl up the bed and try to get at my face. They don't bite, they merely crawl. There are thousands of them—black thousands of silent, crawling things, inches long. I brush them away, but when I fall asleep they come back; they're clever, and I can't pretend. I've never caught one; they're too fast-moving. They seem to understand me—or the Power that sends them understands.

"They crawl up from Hell night after night, and I can't last much longer. Some evening I'll fall completely asleep and they will creep over my face, and then——"

He leaped to his feet and screamed.

"The corner—in the corner now—out of the walls——"

The black shadows were moving, marching.

I saw a blur, fancied I could detect rustling forms advancing, creeping, spreading before the light.

Hartley sobbed.

I turned on the electric light. There was, of course, nothing there. I didn't say a word, but left abruptly. Hartley continued to sit huddled in his chair, his head in his hands.

I went straight to my friend, Doctor Sherman.

2

He diagnosed it as I thought he would: phobia, accompanied by hallucinations. Hartley's feeling of guilt over stealing the mummy haunted him. The visions of beetles resulted.

All this Sherman studded with the mumbo-jumbo technicalities of the professional psychiatrist, but it was simple enough. Together we phoned the institute where Hartley had worked. They verified the story, in so far as they knew Hartley had stolen a mummy.

After dinner Sherman had an appointment, but he promised to meet me at ten and go with me again to Hartley's apartment. I was quite insistent about this, for I felt that there was no time to lose. Of course, this was a mawkish attitude on my part, but that strange afternoon session had deeply disturbed me.

I spent the early evening in unnerving reflection. Perhaps that was the way all so-called "Egyptian curses" worked. A guilty conscience on the part of a tomb-looter made him project the shadow of imaginary punishment on himself. He had hallucinations of retribution. That might explain the mysterious Tut-ankh-ahmen deaths; it certainly accounted for the suicides.

And that was why I insisted on Sherman seeing Hartley that same night. I feared suicide very much, for if ever a man was on the verge of complete mental collapse, Arthur Hartley surely was.

It was nearly eleven, however, before Sherman and I rang the bell. There was no answer. We stood in the dark hallway as I vainly rapped, then pounded. The silence only served to augment my anxiety. I was truly afraid, or else I never would have dared using my skeleton key.

As it was, I felt the end justified the means. We entered.

The living-room was bare of occupants. Nothing had changed since the afternoon—I could see that quite clearly, for all the lights were on, and the guttering candle-stumps still smoldered.

Both Sherman and I smelt the reek of the insecticide quite strongly, and the floor was almost evenly coated with thick white insect powder.

We called, of course, before I ventured to enter the bedroom. It was dark, and I thought it was empty until I turned on the lights and saw the figure huddled beneath the bed-clothes. It was Arthur Hartley, and I needed no second glance to see that his white face was twisted in death.

The reek of insecticide was strongest here, and incense burned; and yet there was another pungent smell—a musty odor, vaguely animal-like.

Sherman stood at my side, staring.

"What shall we do?" I asked.

"I'll get the police on the wire downstairs," he said. "Touch nothing."

He dashed out, and I followed him from the room, sickened. I could not bear to approach the body of my friend —that hideous expression on the face affrighted me. Suicide, murder, heart-attack—I didn't even wish to know the manner of his passing. I was heartsick to think that we had been too late.

I turned from the bedroom and then that damnable scent came to my nostrils redoubled, and I knew. "Beetles!"

But how could there be beetles? It was all an illusion in poor Hartley's brain. Even his twisted mind had realized that there were no apertures in the walls to admit them; that they could not be seen about the place.

And still the smell rose on the air—the reek of death, of decay, of ancient corruption that reigned in Egypt. I followed the scent to the second bedroom, forced the door.

On the bed lay the mummy-case. Hartley had said he locked it up in here. The lid was closed, but ajar.

I opened it. The sides bore inscriptions, and one of them may have pertained to the Scarabæus Curse. I do not know, for I stared only at the ghastly, unshrouded figure that lay within. It was a mummy, and it had been sucked dry. It was all shell. There was a great cavity in the stomach, and as I peered within I could see a few feebly-crawling forms—inch-long, black buttons with great writhing feelers. They shrank back in the light, but not before I saw the scarab patterns on the outer crusted backs.

The secret of the Curse was here—the beetles had dwelt within the body of the mummy! They had eaten it out and nested within, and at night they crawled forth. It was true then!

I SCREAMED once when the thought hit me, and dashed back to Hartley's bedroom. I could hear the sound of footsteps ascending the outer stairs; the police were on their way, but I couldn't wait. I raced into the bedroom, dread tugging at my heart.

Had Hartley's story been true, after all? Were the beetles really messengers of a divine vengeance?

I ran into that bedroom where Arthur Hartley lay, stooped over his huddled figure on the bed. My hands fumbled over the body, searching for a wound. I had to know how he had died.

But there was no blood, there was no mark, and there was no weapon beside him. It had been shock or heart attack, after all. I was strangely relieved when I thought of this. I stood up and eased

the body back again on the pillows.

I felt almost glad, because during my search my hands had moved over the body while my eyes roved over the room. I was looking for beetles.

Hartley had feared the beetles—the beetles that crawled out of the mummy. They had crawled every night, if his story was to be believed; crawled into his room, up the bed-posts, across the pillows.

Where were they now? They had left the mummy and disappeared, and Hartley was dead. Where were they?

Suddenly I stared again at Hartley. There was something wrong with the body on the bed. When I had lifted the corpse it seemed singularly light for a man of Hartley's build. As I gazed at him now, he seemed empty of more than life. I peered into that ravaged face more closely, and then I shuddered. For the cords on his neck moved convulsively, his chest seemed to rise and fall, his head fell sideways on the pillow. He lived—or something inside him did!

And then as his twisted features moved, I cried aloud, for I knew how Hartley had died, and what had killed him; knew the secret of the Scarab Curse and why the beetles crawled out of the mummy to seek his bed. I knew what they had meant to do—what, tonight, they had done. I cried aloud as I saw Hartley's face move, in hopes that my voice would drown that dreadful rustling sound which filled the room and came from *inside Hartley's body*.

I knew that the Scarab Curse had killed him, and I screamed quite wildly as his mouth gaped slowly open. Just as I fainted I saw Arthur Hartley's dead lips part, allowing a rustling swarm of *black Scarabaeus beetles* to pour out across the pillow.

The Ghost Kings

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

The ghost kings are marching; the midnight knows their tread,
From the distant, stealthy planets of the dim, unstable dead;
There are whisperings on the night-winds and the shuddering stars have fled.

A ghostly trumpet echoes from a barren mountainhead;
Through the fen the wandering witch-lights gleam like phantom arrows sped;
There is silence in the valleys and the moon is rising red.

The ghost kings are marching down the ages' dusty maze;
The unseen feet are tramping through the moonlight's pallid haze,
Down the hollow clanging stairways of a million yesterdays.

The ghost kings are marching, where the vague moon-vapor creeps,
While the night-wind to their coming, like a thund'rous herald sweeps;
They are clad in ancient grandeur, but the world, unheeding, sleeps.

Passing of a God*

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

"YOU say that when Carswell came into your hospital over in Port au Prince his fingers looked as though they had been wound with string," said I, encouragingly.

"It is a very ugly story, that, Canevin," replied Doctor Pelletier, still reluctant, it appeared.

"You promised to tell me," I threw in.

"I know it, Canevin," admitted Doctor Pelletier of the U. S. Navy Medical Corps, now stationed here in the Virgin Islands. "But," he proceeded, "you couldn't use this story, anyhow. There are editorial *taboos,* aren't there? The thing is too—what shall I say?—too outrageous, too incredible."

"Yes," I admitted in turn, there are *taboos,* plenty of them. Still, after hearing about those fingers, as though wound with string—why not give me the story, Pelletier; leave it to me whether or not I 'use' it. It's the story I want, mostly. I'm burning up for it!"

"I suppose it's your lookout," said my guest. "If you find it too gruesome for you, tell me and I'll quit."

I plucked up hope once more. I had been trying for this story, after getting little scraps of it which allured and intrigued me, for weeks.

"Start in," I ventured, soothingly, pushing the silver swizzel-jug after the humidor of cigarettes from which Pelletier was even now making a selection. Pelletier helped himself to the swizzel frowningly. Evidently he was torn between the desire to pour out the story of Arthur Carswell and some complication of feelings against doing so. I sat back in my wicker lounge-chair and waited.

Pelletier moved his large bulk about in his chair. Plainly now he was cogitating how to open the tale. He began, meditatively:

"I DON'T know as I ever heard public discussion of the malignant bodily growths except among medical people. Science knows little about them. The fact of such diseases, though, is well known to everybody, through cam-

* From WEIRD TALES for January, 1931.

paigns of prevention, the life insurance companies, appeals for funds.

"Well, Carswell's case, primarily, is one of those cases."

He paused and gazed into the glowing end of his cigarette.

" 'Primarily?' " I threw in encouragingly.

"Yes. Speaking as a surgeon, that's where this thing begins, I suppose."

I kept still, waiting.

"Have you read Seabrook's book, *The Magic Island,* Canevin?" asked Pelletier suddenly.

"Yes," I answered. "What about it?"

"Then I suppose that from your own experience knocking around the West Indies and your study of it all, a good bit of that stuff of Seabrook's is familiar to you, isn't it?—the *vodu,* and the hill customs, and all the rest of it, especially over in Haiti—you could check up on a writer like Seabrook, couldn't you, more or less?"

"Yes," said I, "practically all of it was an old story to me—a very fine piece of work, however, the thing clicks all the way through—an honest and thorough piece of investigation."

"Anything in it new to you?"

"Yes—Seabrook's statement that there was an exchange of personalities between the sacrificial goat—at the 'baptism'—and the young Black girl, the chapter he calls: *Girl-Cry—Goat-Cry.* That, at least, was a new one on me, I admit.

"You will recall, if you read it carefully, that he attributed that phenomenon to his own personal 'slant' on the thing. Isn't that the case, Canevin?"

"Yes," I agreed, "I think that is the way he put it."

"Then," resumed Doctor Pelletier, "I take it that all that material of his—I notice that there have been a lot of story-writers using his terms lately!—is sufficiently familiar to you so that you have some clear idea of the Haitian-African demigods, like Ogoun Badagris, Damballa, and the others, taking up their residence for a short time in some devotee?"

"THE idea is very well understood," said I. "Mr. Seabrook mentions it among a number of other local phenomena. It was an old Negro who came up to him while he was eating, thrust his soiled hands into the dishes of food, surprised him considerably—then was surrounded by worshippers who took him to the nearest *houmfort* or *vodu*-house, let him sit on the altar, brought him food, hung all their jewelry on him, worshipped him for the time being; then, characteristically, quite utterly ignored the original old fellow after the 'possession' on the part of the 'deity' ceased and reduced him to an unimportant old pantaloon as he was before."

"That summarizes it exactly," agreed Doctor Pelletier. "That, Canevin, that kind of thing, I mean, is the real starting-place of this dreadful matter of Arthur Carswell."

"You mean——?" I barged out at Pelletier, vastly intrigued. I had had no idea that there was *vodu* mixed in with the case.

"I mean that Arthur Carswell's first intimation that there was anything pressingly wrong with him was just such a 'possession' as the one you have recounted."

"But—but," I protested, "I had supposed—I had every reason to believe, that it was a surgical matter! Why, you just objected to telling about it on the ground that——"

"Precisely," said Doctor Pelletier, calmly. "It was such a surgical case,

but, as I say, it *began* in much the same way as the 'occupation' of that old Negro's body by Ogoun Badagris or whichever one of their devilish deities that happened to be, just as, you say, is well known to fellows like yourself who go in for such things, and just as Seabrook recorded it."

"Well," said I, "you go ahead in your own way, Pelletier. "I'll do my best to listen. Do you mind an occasional question?"

"Not in the least," said Doctor Pelletier considerately, shifted himself to a still more pronouncedly recumbent position in my Chinese rattan lounge-chair, lit a fresh cigarette, and proceeded:

"CARSWELL had worked up a considerable intimacy with the snake-worship of interior Haiti, all the sort of thing familiar to you; the sort of thing set out, probably for the first time in English at least, in Seabrook's book; all the gatherings, and the 'baptism,' and the sacrifices of the fowls and the bull, and the goats; the orgies of the worshippers, the boom and thrill of the *rata* drums—all that strange, incomprehensible, rather silly-surfaced, deadly-underneathed worship of 'the Snake' which the Dahomeyans brought with them to old Hispaniola, now Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

"He had been there, as you may have heard, for a number of years; went there in the first place because everybody thought he was a kind of failure at home; made a good living, too, in a way nobody but an original-minded fellow like him would have thought of—shot ducks on the Léogane marshes, dried them, and exported them to New York and San Francisco to the United States' two largest Chinatowns.

"For a 'failure,' too, Carswell was a particularly smart-looking chap—smart, I mean, in the English sense of that word. He was one of those fellows who was always shaved, clean, freshly groomed, even under the rather adverse conditions of his living, there in Léogane by the salt marshes; and of his trade, which was to kill and dry ducks.

"A fellow can get pretty careless and let himself go at that sort of thing, away from 'home'; away, too, from such niceties as there are in a place like Port au Prince.

"He looked, in fact, like a fellow just off somebody's yacht the first time I saw him, there in the hospital in Port au Prince, and that, too, was right after a rather singular experience which would have unnerved or unsettled pretty nearly anybody.

"But not so old Carswell. No, indeed. I speak of him as 'Old Carswell,' Canevin. That, though, is a kind of affectionate term. He was somewhere about forty-five then; it was two years ago, you see, and, in addition to his being very spick and span, well groomed, you know he looked surprisingly young, somehow. One of those faces which showed experience, but, along with the experience, a philosophy. The lines in his face were *good* lines, if you get what I mean—lines of humor and courage; no dissipation, no let-down kind of lines, nothing of slackness such as you would see in the face of even a comparatively young beach-comber. No, as he strode into my office, almost jauntily, there in the hospital, there was nothing, nothing whatever, about him, to suggest anything else but a prosperous fellow American, a professional chap, for choice, who might, as I say, have just come ashore from somebody's yacht.

"And yet—good God, Canevin, the story that came out——"

Naval surgeon though he was, with service in Haiti, at sea, in Nicaragua and the China Station to his credit, Doctor Pelletier rose at this point, and, almost agitatedly, walked up and down my gallery. Then he sat down and lit a fresh cigarette.

"There is," he said, reflectively, and as though weighing his words carefully, "there is, Canevin, among various others, a somewhat 'wild' theory that somebody put forward several years ago, about the origin of malignant tumors. It never gained very much approval among the medical profession, but it has, at least, the merit of originality, and—it was new. Because of those facts, it had a certain amount of currency, and there are those, in and out of medicine, who still believe in it. It is that there are certain nuclei, certain masses, so to speak, of the bodily material which have persisted—not generally, you understand, but in certain cases—among certain persons, the kind who are 'susceptible' to this horrible disease, which, in the pre-natal state, did not develop fully or normally —little places in the bodily structure, that is—if I make myself clear?—which remain undeveloped.

"Something, according to this hypothesis, something like a sudden jar, or a bruise, a kick, a blow with the fist, the result of a fall, or whatnot, causes traumatism—physical injury, that is, you know—to one of the focus-places, and the undeveloped little mass of material starts in to grow, and so displaces the normal tissue which surrounds it.

"One objection to the theory is that there are at least two varieties, well-known and recognized scientifically; the carcinoma, which is itself subdivided into two kinds, the hard and the soft carcinoma, and the sarcoma, which is a soft thing, like what is popularly understood by a 'tumor.' Of course they are all 'tumors,' particular kinds of tumors, malignant tumors. What lends a certain credibility to the theory I have just mentioned is the malignancy, the growing element. For, whatever the underlying reason, they grow, Canevin, as is well recognized, and this explanation I have been talking about gives a reason for the growth. The 'malignancy' is, really, that one of the things seems to have, as it were, its own life. All this, probably, you know?"

I NODDED. I did not wish to interrupt. I could see that this side-issue on a scientific by-path must have something to do with the story of Carswell.

"Now," resumed Pelletier, "notice this fact, Canevin. Let me put it in the form of a question, like this: To what kind, or type, of *vodu* worshipper, does the 'possession' by one of their deities occur—from your own knowledge of such things, what would you say?"

"To the incomplete; the abnormal, to an *old* man, or woman," said I, slowly, reflecting, "or—to a child, or, perhaps, to an idiot. Idiots, ancient crones, backward children, 'town-fools' and the like, all over Europe, are supposed to be in some mysterious way *en rapport* with deity—or with Satan! It is an established peasant belief. Even among the Mahometans, the moron or idiot is 'the afflicted of God.' There is no other better established belief along such lines of thought."

"Precisely!" exclaimed Pelletier, "and, Canevin, go back once more to Seabrook's instance that we spoke about. What type of person was 'possessed'?"

"An old doddering man," said I,

"one well gone in his dotage apparently."

"Right once more! Note now, two things. First, I will admit to you, Canevin, that that theory I have just been expounding never made much of a hit with me. It might be true, but—very few first-rate men in our profession thought much of it, and I followed that negative lead and didn't think much of it, or, indeed, much about it. I put it down to the vaporings of the theorist who first thought it out and published it, and let it go at that. Now, Canevin, *I am convinced that it is true!* The second thing, then: When Carswell came into my office in the hospital over there in Port au Prince, the first thing I noticed about him—I had never seen him before, you see—was a peculiar, almost an indescribable, discrepancy. It was between his general appearance of weather-worn cleanliness, general fitness, his 'smart' appearance in his clothes—all that, which fitted together about the clean-cut, open character of the fellow; and what I can only describe as a pursiness. He seemed in good condition, I mean to say, and yet—there was something, somehow, *flabby* somewhere in his make-up. I couldn't put my finger on it, but—it was there, a suggestion of something that detracted from the impression he gave as being an upstanding fellow, a good-fellow-to-have-beside-you-in-a-pinch—that kind of person.

"THE SECOND thing I noticed, it was just after he had taken a chair beside my desk, was his fingers, and thumbs. They were swollen, Canevin, looked sore, as though they had been wound with string. That was the first thing I thought of, being wound with string. He saw me looking at them, held them out to me abruptly, laid them side by side—his hands I mean—on my desk, and smiled at me.

" 'I see you have noticed them, Doctor,' he remarked, almost jovially. 'That makes it a little easier for me to tell you what I'm here for. It's—well, you might put it down as a "symptom".'

"I looked at his fingers and thumbs; every one of them was affected in the same way; and ended up with putting a magnifying glass over them.

"They were all bruised and reddened, and here and there on several of them, the skin was abraded, broken, *circularly*—it was a most curious-looking set of digits. My new patient was addressing me again:

" 'I'm not here to ask you riddles, Doctor,' he said, gravely, this time, 'but—would you care to make a guess at what did that to those fingers and thumbs of mine?'

" 'Well,' I came back at him, 'without knowing what's happened, it *looks* as if you'd been trying to wear about a hundred rings, all at one time, and most of them didn't fit!'

"Carswell nodded his head at me. 'Score one for the medico,' said he, and laughed. 'Even numerically you're almost on the dot, sir. The precise number was one hundred and six!'

"I confess, I stared at him then. But he wasn't fooling. It was a cold, sober, serious fact that he was stating; only, he saw that it had a humorous side, and that intrigued him, as anything humorous always did, I found out after I got to know Carswell a lot better than I did then."

"You said you wouldn't mind a few questions, Pelletier," I interjected.

"Fire away," said Pelletier. "Do you see any light, so far?"

"I was naturally figuring along with you, as you told about it all," said I.

"Do you infer correctly that Carswell, having lived there, how long, four or five years or so?——"

"Seven, to be exact," put in Pelletier.

"——that Carswell, being pretty familiar with the native doings, had mixed into things, got the confidence of his Black neighbors in and around Léogane, become somewhat 'adept,' had the run of the *houmforts,* so to speak—*'votre bougie, M'sieu'*—the fortune-telling at the festivals and so forth, and—had been 'visited' by one of the Black deities? That, apparently, if I'm any judge of tendencies, is what your account seems to be leading up to. Those bruised fingers—the one hundred and six rings—good heavens, man, is it really possible?"

"CARSWELL told me all about that end of it, a little later—yes, that was, precisely, what happened, but—that, surprising incredible as it seems, is only the small end of it all. You just wait——"

"Go ahead," said I, "I am all ears, I assure you!"

"Well, Carswell took his hands off the desk after I had looked at them through my magnifying glass, and then waved one of them at me in a kind of deprecating gesture.

" 'I'll go into all that, if you're interested to hear about it, Doctor,' he assured me, 'but that isn't what I'm here about.' His face grew suddenly very grave. 'Have you plenty of time?' he asked. 'I don't want to let my case interfere with anything.'

" 'Fire ahead,' says I, and he leaned forward in his chair.

" 'Doctor,' says he, 'I don't know whether or not you ever heard of me before. My name's Carswell, and I live over Léogane way. I'm an American, like yourself, as you can probably see, and, even after seven years of it, out there, duck-hunting, mostly, with virtually no White-man's doings for a pretty long time, I haven't "gone native" or anything of the sort. I wouldn't want you to think I'm one of those wasters.' He looked up at me inquiringly for my estimate of him. He had been by himself a good deal; perhaps too much. I nodded at him. He looked me in the eye, squarely, and nodded back. 'I guess we understand each other,' he said. Then he went on.

" 'Seven years ago, it was, I came down here. I've lived over there ever since. What few people know about me regard me as a kind of failure, I daresay. But—Doctor, there was a reason for that, a pretty definite reason. I won't go into it beyond your end of it—the medical end, I mean. I came down because of this.'

"He stood up then, and I saw what made that 'discrepancy' I spoke about, that 'flabbiness' which went so ill with the general cut of the man. He turned up the lower ends of his white drill jacket and put his hand a little to the left of the middle of his stomach. 'Just notice this,' he said, and stepped toward me.

"There, just over the left center of that area and extending up toward the spleen, on the left side, you know, there was a protuberance. Seen closely it was apparent that here was some sort of internal growth. It was that which made him look flabby, stomachish.

" 'This was diagnosed for me in New York,' Carswell explained, 'a little more than seven years ago. They told me it was inoperable then. After seven years, probably, I daresay it's worse, if anything. To put the thing in a nutshell, Doctor, I had to "let go" then. I got out of a promising business, broke off my engagement, came here. I won't

expatiate on it all, but—it was pretty tough, Doctor, pretty tough. I've lasted all right, so far. It hasn't troubled me—until just lately. That's why I drove in this afternoon, to see you, to see if anything could be done.'

" 'Has it been kicking up lately?' I asked him.

" 'Yes,' said Carswell, simply. 'They said it would kill me, probably within a year or so, as it grew. It hasn't grown —much. I've lasted a little more than seven years, so far.'

" 'Come in to the operating-room,' I invited him, 'and take your clothes off, and let's get a good look at it.'

" 'Anything you say,' returned Carswell, and followed me back into the operating-room then and there.

"I had a good look at Carswell, first, superficially. That preliminary examination revealed a growth quite typical, the self-contained, not the 'fibrous' type, in the location I've already described, and about the size of an average man's head. It lay imbedded, fairly deep. It was what we call 'encapsulated.' That, of course, is what had kept Carswell alive.

"Then we put the X-rays on it, fore-and-aft, and sidewise. One of those things doesn't always respond very well to skiagraphic examination, to the X-ray, that is, but this one showed clearly enough. Inside it appeared a kind of dark, triangular mass, with the small end at the top. When Doctor Smithson and I had looked him over thoroughly, I asked Carswell whether or not he wanted to stay with us, to come into the hospital as a patient, for treatment.

" 'I'm quite in your hands, Doctor,' he told me. 'I'll stay, or do whatever you want me to. But, first,' and for the first time he looked a trifle embarrassed, 'I think I'd better tell you the story that goes with my coming here! However, speaking plainly, do you think I have a chance?'

" 'Well,' said I, 'speaking plainly, yes, there is a chance, maybe a "fifty-fifty" chance, maybe a little less. On the one hand, this thing has been let alone for seven years since original diagnosis. It's probably less operable than it was when you were in New York. On the other hand, we know a lot more, not about these things, Mr. Carswell, but about surgical technique, than they did seven years ago. On the whole, I'd advise you to stay and get ready for an operation, and, say about "forty-sixty" you'll go back to Léogane, or back to New York if you feel like it, several pounds lighter in weight and a new man. If it takes you, on the table, well, you've had a lot more time out there gunning for ducks in Léogane than those New York fellows allowed you.'

" 'I'm with you,' said Carswell, and we assigned him a room, took his 'history', and began to get him ready for his operation.

"WE DID the operation two days later, at ten-thirty in the morning, and in the meantime Carswell told me his 'story' about it.

"It seems that he had made quite a place for himself, there in Léogane, among the negroes and the ducks. In seven years a man like Carswell, with his mental and dispositional equipment, can go quite a long way, anywhere. He had managed to make quite a good thing out of his duck-drying industry, employed five or six 'hands' in his little wooden 'factory,' rebuilt a rather good house he had secured there for a song right after he had arrived, collected local antiques to add to the equipment he had brought along with him, made him-

self a real home of a peculiar, bachelor kind, and, above all, got in solid with the Black People all around him. Almost incidentally I gathered from him —he had no gift of narrative, and I had to question him a great deal—he had got onto, and into, the know in the *vodu* thing. There wasn't, as far as I could get it, any aspect of it all that he hadn't been in on, except, that is, *'la chevre sans cornes'*—the goat without horns, you know—the human sacrifice on great occasions. In fact, he strenuously denied that the *voduists* resorted to that; said it was a *canard* against them; that they never, really, did such things, never had, unless back in prehistoric times, in Guinea—Africa.

"But, there wasn't anything about it all that he hadn't at his very fingerends, and at first-hand, too. The man was a walking encyclopedia of the native beliefs, customs, and practises. He knew, too, every turn and twist of their speech. He hadn't, as he had said at first, 'gone native' in the slightest degree, and yet, without lowering his White Man's dignity by a trifle, he had got it all.

"That brings us to the specific happening, the 'story' which, he had said, went along with his reason for coming in to the hospital in Port au Prince, to us.

"It appears that his sarcoma had never, practically, troubled. Beyond noting a very gradual increase in its size from year to year, he said, he 'wouldn't know he had one.' In other words, characteristically, it never gave him any pain or direct annoyance beyond the sense of the wretched thing being there, and increasing on him, and always drawing him closer to that end of life which the New York doctors had warned him about.

"Then, it had happened only three days before he came to the hospital, he had gone suddenly unconscious one afternoon, as he was walking down his shell path to his gateway. The last thing he remembered then was being 'about four steps from the gate.' When he woke up, it was dark. He was seated in a big chair on his own front gallery, and the first thing he noticed was that his fingers and thumbs were sore and ached very painfully. The next thing was that there were flares burning all along the edge of the gallery, and down in the front yard, and along the road outside the paling fence that divided his property from the road, and in the light of these flares there swarmed literally hundreds of negroes, gathered about him and mostly on their knees; lined along the gallery and on the grounds below it; prostrating themselves, chanting, putting earth and sand on their heads; and, when he leaned back in his chair, something hurt the back of his neck, and he found that he was being nearly choked with the necklaces, strings of beads, gold and silver coin-strings, and other kinds, that had been draped over his head. His fingers, and the thumbs as well, were covered with gold and silver rings, many of them jammed on so as to stop the circulation.

"From his knowledge of their beliefs, he recognized what had happened to him. He had, he figured, probably fainted, although such a thing was not at all common with him, going down the pathway to the yard gate, and the Blacks had supposed him to be possessed as he had several times seen Black people, children, old men and women, morons, chiefly, similarly 'possessed.' He knew that, now that he was recovered from whatever had happened to him, the 'worship' ought to cease and if he simply sat quiet and took what was

coming to him, they would, as soon as they realized he was 'himself' once more, leave him alone and he would get some relief from this uncomfortable set of surroundings; get rid of the necklaces and the rings; get a little privacy.

"But—the queer part of it all was that they didn't quit. No, the mob around the house and on the gallery increased rather than diminished, and at last he was put to it, from sheer discomfort—he said he came to the point where he felt he couldn't stand it all another instant—to speak up and ask the people to leave him in peace.

"THEY left him, he says, at that, immediately, without a protesting voice, but — and here was what started him on his major puzzlement—they didn't take off the necklaces and rings. No—they left the whole set of that metallic drapery which they had hung and thrust upon him right there, and, after he had been left alone, as he had requested, and had gone into his house, and lifted off the necklaces and worked the rings loose, the next thing that happened was that old Pa'p Josef, the local *papaloi,* together with three or four other neighboring *papalois,* witch-doctors from near-by villages, and followed by a very old man who was known to Carswell as the *hougan* or head witch-doctor of the whole countryside thereabouts, came in to him in a kind of procession, and knelt down all around him on the floor of his living-room, and laid down gourds of cream and bottles of red rum and cooked chickens, and even a big china bowl of Tannia soup—a dish he abominated, said it always tasted like soapy water to him!—and then backed out leaving him to these comestibles.

"He said that this sort of attention persisted in his case, right through the three days that he remained in his house in Léogane, before he started out for the hospital; would, apparently, be still going on if he hadn't come in to Port au Prince to us.

"But—his coming in was not, in the least, because of this. It had puzzled him a great deal, for there was nothing like it in his experience, nor, so far as he could gather from their attitude, in the experience of the people about him, of the *papalois,* or even of the *hougan* himself. They acted, in other words, precisely as though the 'deity' supposed to have taken up his abode within him had remained there, although there seemed no precedent for such an occurrence, and, so far as he knew, he felt precisely just as he had felt right along, that is, fully awake, and, certainly, not in anything like an abnormal condition, and, very positively, not in anything like a fainting-fit!

"That is to say, he felt precisely the same as usual except that—he attributed it to the probability that he must have fallen on the ground that time when he lost consciousness going down the pathway to the gate (he had been told that passers-by had picked him up and carried him to the gallery where he had awakened, later, these Good Samaritans meanwhile recognizing that one of the 'deities' had indwelt him)—he felt the same except for recurrent, almost unbearable pains in the vicinity of his lower abdominal region.

"There was nothing surprising to him in this accession of the new painfulness. He had been warned that that would be the beginning of the end. It was in the rather faint hope that something might be done that he had come in to the hospital. It speaks volumes for the man's fortitude, for his strength of character, that he came in so cheerfully; acquiesced in what we suggested

to him to do; remained with us, facing these comparatively slim chances with complete cheerfulness.

"For—we did not deceive Carswell—the chances were somewhat slim. 'Sixty-forty' I had said, but as I afterward made clear to him, the favorable chances, as gleaned from the mortality tables, were a good deal less than that.

"He went to the table in a state of mind quite unchanged from his accustomed cheerfulness. He shook hands good-bye with Doctor Smithson and me, 'in case,' and also with Doctor Jackson, who acted as anesthetist.

"CARSWELL took an enormous amount of ether to get him off. His consciousness persisted longer, perhaps, than that of any surgical patient I can remember. At last, however, Doctor Jackson intimated to me that I might begin, and, Doctor Smithson standing by with the retracting forceps, I made the first incision. It was my intention, after careful study of the X-ray plates, to open it up from in front, in an up-and-down direction, establish drainage directly, and, leaving the wound in the sound tissue in front of it open, to attempt to get it healed up after removing its contents. Such is the technique of the major portion of successful operations.

"It was a comparatively simple matter to expose the outer wall. This accomplished, and after a few words of consultation with my colleague, I very carefully opened it. We recalled that the X-ray had shown, as I mentioned, a triangular-shaped mass within. This apparent content we attributed to some obscure chemical coloration of the contents.

"I made my incisions with the greatest care and delicacy, of course. The critical part of the operation lay right at this point, and the greatest exactitude was indicated.

"At last the outer coats of it were cut through, and retracted, and with renewed caution I made the incision through the inmost wall of tissue. To my surprise, and to Doctor Smithson's, the inside was comparatively dry. The gauze which the nurse attending had caused to follow the path of the knife, was hardly moistened. I ran my knife down below the original scope of that last incision, then upward from its upper extremity, greatly lengthening the incision as a whole, if you are following me.

"Then, reaching my gloved hand within this long up-and-down aperture, I felt about and at once discovered that I could get my fingers in around the inner containing wall quite easily. I reached and worked my fingers in farther and farther, finally getting both hands inside and at last feeling my fingers touch inside the posterior or rear wall. Rapidly, now, I ran the edges of my hands around inside, and, quite easily, lifted out the 'inside.' This, a mass weighing several pounds, of more or less solid material, was laid aside on the small table beside the operating-table, and, again pausing to consult with Doctor Smithson—the operation was going, you see, a lot better than either of us had dared to anticipate—and being encouraged by him to proceed to a radical step which we had not hoped to be able to take, I began the dissection from the surrounding, normal tissue of the now collapsed walls. This, a long, difficult, and harassing job, was accomplished at the end of, perhaps, ten or twelve minutes of gruelling work, and the bag-like thing, now completely severed from the tissues in which it had been for so long imbedded, was placed also on the side table.

"Doctor Jackson reporting favorably on our patient's condition under the anesthetic, I now proceeded to dress the large aperture, and to close the body-wound. This was accomplished in a routine manner, and then, together, we bandaged Carswell, and he was taken back to his room to await awakening from the ether.

"Carswell disposed of, Doctor Jackson and Doctor Smithson left the operating-room and the nurse started in cleaning up after the operation; dropping the instruments into the boiler, and so on—a routine set of duties. As for me, I picked up the shell in a pair of forceps, turned it about under the strong electric operating-light, and laid it down again. It presented nothing of interest for a possible laboratory examination.

"Then I picked up the more or less solid contents which I had laid, very hastily, and without looking at it—you see, my actual removal of it had been done inside, in the dark for the most part and by the sense of feeling, with my hands, you will remember—I picked it up; I still had my operating-gloves on to prevent infection when looking over these specimens, and, still, not looking at it particularly, carried it out into the laboratory.

"Canevin"—Doctor Pelletier looked at me somberly through the very gradually fading light of late afternoon, the period just before the abrupt falling of our tropic dusk—"Canevin," he repeated, "honestly, I don't know how to tell you! Listen now, old man, do something for me, will you?"

"Why, yes—of course," said I, considerably mystified. "What is it you want me to do, Pelletier?"

"My car is out in front of the house. Come on home with me, up to my house, will you? Let's say I want to give you a cocktail! Anyhow, maybe you'll understand better when you are there; I want to tell you the rest up at my house, not here. Will you please come, Canevin?"

I looked at him closely. This seemed to me a very strange, an abrupt, request. Still, there was nothing whatever unreasonable about such a sudden whim on Pelletier's part.

"Why, yes, certainly I'll go with you, Pelletier, if you want me to."

"Come on, then," said Pelletier, and we started for his car.

The doctor drove himself, and after we had taken the first turn in the rather complicated route from my house to his, on the extreme airy top of Denmark Hill, he said, in a quiet voice:

"Put together, now, Canevin, certain points if you please, in this story. Note, kindly, how the Black people over in Léogane acted, according to Carswell's story. Note, too, that theory I was telling you about; do you recollect it clearly?"

"Yes," said I, still more mystified.

"Just keep those two points in mind, then," added Doctor Pelletier, and devoted himself to navigating sharp turns and plodding up two steep roadways for the rest of the drive to his house.

We went in and found his houseboy laying the table for his dinner. Doctor Pelletier is unmarried, keeps a hospitable bachelor establishment. He ordered cocktails, and the houseboy departed on this errand. Then he led me into a kind of office, littered with medical and surgical paraphernalia. He lifted some papers off a chair, motioned me into it, and took another near by. "Listen, now!" he said, and held up a finger at me.

"I took that thing, as I mentioned, into the laboratory," said he. "I car-

ried it in my hand, with my gloves still on, as aforesaid. I laid it down on a table and turned on a powerful light over it. It was only then that I took a good look at it. It weighed several pounds at least, was about the bulk and heft of a full-grown coconut, and about the same color as a hulled coconut, that is, a kind of medium brown. As I looked at it, I saw that it was, as the X-ray had indicated, vaguely triangular in shape. It lay over on one of its sides under that powerful light, and—Canevin, so help me God"—Doctor Pelletier leaned toward me, his face working, a great seriousness in his eyes—"it moved, Canevin," he murmured; "and, as I looked—the thing *breathed!* I was just plain dumfounded. A biological specimen like that—does not move, Canevin! I shook all over, suddenly. I felt my hair prickle on the roots of my scalp. I felt chills go down my spine. Then I remembered that here I was, after an operation, in my own biological laboratory. I came close to the thing and propped it up, on what might be called its logical base, if you see what I mean, so that it stood as nearly upright as its triangular conformation permitted.

"THEN I saw that it had faint yellowish markings over the brown, and that what you might call its skin was moving, and—as I stared at the thing, Canevin—two things like little arms began to move, and the top of it gave a kind of convulsive shudder, and it opened straight at me, Canevin, a pair of eyes and looked me in the face.

"Those eyes — my God, Canevin, those eyes! They were eyes of something more than human, Canevin, something incredibly evil, something vastly old, sophisticated, cold, immune from anything except pure evil, the eyes of something that had been worshipped, Canevin, from ages and ages out of a past that went back before all known human calculation, eyes that showed all the deliberate, lurking wickedness that has ever been in the world. The eyes closed, Canevin, and the thing sank over onto its side, and heaved and shuddered convulsively.

"It was sick, Canevin; and now, emboldened, holding myself together, repeating over and over to myself that I had a case of the quavers, of post-operative 'nerves,' I forced myself to look closer, and as I did so I got from it a faint whiff of ether. Two tiny, ape-like nostrils, over a clamped-shut slit of a mouth, were exhaling and inhaling; drawing in the good, pure air, exhaling ether fumes. It popped into my head that Carswell had consumed a terrific amount of ether before he went under; we had commented on that, Doctor Jackson particularly. I put two and two together, Canevin, remembered we were in Haiti, where things are not like New York, or Boston, or Baltimore! Those negroes had believed that the 'deity' had not come out of Carswell, do you see? *That* was the thing that held the edge of my mind. The thing stirred uneasily, put out one of its 'arms,' groped about, stiffened.

"I reached for a near-by specimen-jar, Canevin, reasoning, almost blindly, that if this thing were susceptible to ether, it would be susceptible to—well, my gloves were still on my hands, and —now shuddering so that I could hardly move at all, I had to force every motion—I reached out and took hold of the thing—it felt like moist leather —and dropped it into the jar. Then I carried the carboy of preserving alcohol over to the table and poured it in till the ghastly thing was entirely covered, the alcohol near the top of the

jar. It writhed once, then rolled over on its 'back,' and lay still, the mouth now open. Do you believe me, Canevin?"

"I have always said that I would believe anything, on proper evidence," said I, slowly, "and I would be the last to question a statement of yours, Pelletier. However, although I have, as you say, looked into some of these things perhaps more than most, it seems, well——"

Doctor Pelletier said nothing. Then he slowly got up out of his chair. He stepped over to a wall-cupboard and returned, a wide-mouthed specimen-jar in his hand. He laid the jar down before me, in silence.

I looked into it, through the slightly discolored alcohol with which the jar, tightly sealed with rubber-tape and sealing-wax, was filled nearly to the brim. There, on the jar's bottom, lay such a thing as Pelletier had described (a thing which, if it had been "seated," upright, would somewhat have resembled that representation of the happy little godling "Billiken" which was popular twenty years ago as a desk ornament), a thing suggesting the sinister, the unearthly, even in this dessicated form. I looked long at the thing.

"Excuse me for even seeming to hesitate, Pelletier," said I, reflectively.

"I can't say that I blame you," returned the genial doctor. "It is, by the way, the first and only time I have ever tried to tell the story to anybody."

"And Carswell?" I asked. "I've been intrigued with that good fellow and his difficulties. How did he come out of it all?"

"He made a magnificent recovery from the operation," said Pelletier, "and afterward, when he went back to Léogane, he told me that the negroes, while glad to see him quite as usual, had quite lost interest in him as the throne of a 'divinity'."

"H'm," I remarked, "it would seem, that, to bear out——"

"Yes," said Pelletier "I have always regarded that fact as absolutely conclusive. Indeed, how otherwise could one possibly account for—*this?*" He indicated the contents of the laboratory jar.

I nodded my head, in agreement with him. "I can only say that—if you won't feel insulted, Pelletier—that you are singularly open-minded, for a man of science! What, by the way, became of Carswell?"

The houseboy came in with a tray, and Pelletier and I drank to each other's good health.

"He came in to Port au Prince," replied Pelletier after he had done the honors. "He did not want to go back to the States, he said. The lady to whom he had been engaged had died a couple of years before; he felt that he would be out of touch with American business. The fact is—he had stayed out here too long, too continuously. But, he remains an 'authority' on Haitian native affairs, and is consulted by the High Commissioner. He knows, literally, more about Haiti than the Haitians themselves. I wish you might meet him; you'd have a lot in common."

"I'll hope to do that," said I, and rose to leave. The houseboy appeared at the door, smiling in my direction.

"The table is set for two, sar," said he.

Doctor Pelletier led the way into the dining-room, taking it for granted that I would remain and dine with him. We are informal in St. Thomas about such matters. I telephoned home and sat down with him.

Pelletier suddenly laughed—he was halfway through his soup at the moment. I looked up inquiringly. He put down his soup spoon and looked across the table at me.

"It's a bit odd," he remarked, "when you stop to think of it! There's one thing Carswell doesn't know about Haiti and what happens there!"

"What's that?" I inquired.

"That—thing—in there," said Pelletier, indicating the office with his thumb in the way artists and surgeons do. "I thought he'd had troubles enough without *that* on his mind, too."

I nodded in agreement and resumed my soup. Pelletier has a cook in a thousand. . . .

AS THIS issue goes to press, we are saddened by the news of the death of Gladys Gordon Trenery in England. Under her pen name, G. G. Pendarves, Miss Trenery was well known to the readers of WEIRD TALES, her stories being eagerly read by many thousands of you. Beginning with *The Devil's Graveyard,* back in 1926, this brilliant English author has had nineteen stories in this magazine, including such favorites as *The Eighth Green Man, The Lord of the Tarn, The Altar of Melek Taos, The Dark Star,* and *Thing of Darkness.* Peace to her shade!

Dunsany and Lovecraft

E. Hoffmann Price writes from Redwood City, California: "In the October Eyrie, Robert Black writes, re HPL's having read Lord Dunsany, and expecting maledictions from outraged HPL fans. They should not be outraged. When I saw HPL in 1933, he outlined his literary studies one night as we hoofed it through the older streets of Providence, Rhode Island, passing by the house of the widow who had, years ago, numbered Poe among her admirers. This led to extensive discussion of Poe's influence on HPL's work; we sat in HPL's 'private graveyard,' whose dramatic lighting, a blend of mist and arc-light and incredible shadows, was as striking as the maestro's word-pictures. Well—to cut short these recollections of HPL, I will say that he frankly admitted the strong influence of Lord Dunsany, just as strong as that of Poe. He said that his career had been a succession of such influences and that at the time he was laboring to turn out what he termed 'a less derivative' type of story. Thus, Mr. Black's observation is accurate, and just. No one was ever more frank and honest than HPL. And, I am sure, none of his admirers can justly be outraged at the idea that he, like most of us in this business, was influenced by Lord Dunsany and others."

Who Is This Gal?

Bernard Austin Dyer writes from Wawayanda, New York: "Please, who is Caroline Ferber? Is she Trudy Hemken operating incognito or under a *nom de plume?* Or is she some base, envious female, trying to steal our Trudy's thunder? Please explain this deep and dark mystery, which has me tearing my hair (what there is left of it), weeping and wailing, and walking the floor o' nights, to the no small annoyance of tenants on the floor beneath. Let me, right here, give my vote for first place to the shortest story in the magazine—Manly Wade Wellman's *Up Under the Roof.* (I am not taking into the account the Lovecraft reprint. There is only one Lovecraft. Here was a Cæsar! When comes such another?) However, very short stories seldom receive warm enough commendation to grant them first place. I unhesitatingly give Mr. Wellman's brief opus first place in my regard, and prefer it to anything (except the Lovecraft) in the book. Lovecraft himself would pronounce that tale good. It strikes me as very highly original, and as a masterpiece of atmosphere and of brooding terror. . . . The description of that weird old house; the little boy all alone with his nightly terrors; the dreary rainy day, and the faint brown light of the lumber room—the kid's search in the utter darkness and the splendidly strong simplicity of the ending: 'Nor did I ever know fear again, not even in the war.' These are superb. The thing is so plainly, simply, and naturally written, has such exquisite atmosphere, and carries such utter conviction. I can fairly feel and see that old house, and the kid in bed, up under the roof, listening to the stirring trees outside, the terrible noises overhead, and shuddering. This is the best thing of Mr. Wellman's that I have ever read."

Kindly Lamas

Ralph Rayburn Phillips writes from Portland, Oregon: "Permit a Buddhist to reassure Gertrude Hemken that lamas are kindly fellows; it was unkind of Mr. Quinn to shatter her belief. Dor-je-tshi-ring in *Living Buddhess* was just one bad egg. Whoever said that WEIRD TALES was a magazine for skeptics was all wrong; it would be correct to say that WEIRD TALES is a magazine for students and thinkers, they are the readers who enjoy the magazine most; Sylvia B. Baker of California is right. After all, what is a skeptic? Too many of these skeptics are blind as bats and have a worm's-eye viewpoint; their knowledge is consequently extremely limited. We live and move and have our being in Mystery! A certain amount of skepticism is O.K., but too much is a great detriment."

Hark, Hark! the Lark!

Jack Darrow writes from Chicago, Illinois: "By far the best story in the October issue, and the most interesting I've read in some time, is *Beyond the Phœnix,* by Henry Kuttner. This series should prove to be as popular as Conan. It is as adventurous and much more weird. Henry Kuttner, I've missed out on a lot of your stories, but by heaven I'm going to catch up. I was disappointed in the end of *The Fire Princess.* Phooey, Edmond! Have you a heart of stone? It was a good story otherwise. G. G. Pendarves should make a hit with his little short—*The Black Monk.* A five-minute tale of finest quality. *Up Under the Roof* is one of those miniatures that rise far above many a longer tale. It's a story that should be read by everyone. What! Haven't I mentioned *Black Moon,* a tale of de Grandin, my old pal? But who doesn't like his adventures! Not many, I'll bet."

Beyond the Phœnix

Clifford Francis writes from Chesapeake, Ohio: "I have just finished reading the October issue of WEIRD, and of all the stories in it I think that *Beyond the Phœnix* is the best. Kuttner really knows his story writing. But taking all the stories together, well, they are all good. If you just sort of mix them up that way every issue it will suit me fine. . . . Give us an article every month on something in the weird line such as historical facts about witches, old books of black magic, curses, Egyptology, and other

(*Please turn to page* 762)

COMING NEXT MONTH

I DIDN'T WAKE UP till near sunset, and knew instantly how long I had slept from the golden light and long shadows outside the window. Nobody was about, and a sort of unnatural stillness seemed to be hovering over everything. From afar, though, I thought I could sense a faint howling, wild and intermittent, whose quality had a baffling familiarity about it. I'm not much for psychic premonitions, but I was frightfully uneasy from the start. There had been dreams, even worse than the ones I had been dreaming in the weeks before; and this time they seemed hideously linked to some black and festering reality. The whole place had a poisonous air. Afterward I reflected that certain sounds must have filtered through to my unconscious brain during those hours of drugged sleep. I rose and walked.

Soon enough I began to see that something was wrong. Marsh and Marceline might have been riding, but someone ought to have been getting dinner in the kitchen. Instead there was only silence, except for that faint distant howl or wail, and nobody answered when I pulled the old-fashioned bell-cord to summon Scipio. Then, chancing to look up, I saw the spreading stain on the ceiling—the bright red stain, that must have come through the floor of Marceline's room.

In an instant I forgot my crippled back and hurried upstairs to find out the worst. Everything under the sun raced through my mind as I struggled with the dampness-warped door of that silent chamber, and most hideous of all was a terrible sense of malign fulfillment and fatal expectedness. I had, it struck me, known all along that nameless horrors were gathering; that something profoundly evil had gained a foothold under my roof from which only blood and tragedy could result.

The door gave at last, and I stumbled into the large room beyond. For a moment I could do nothing but flinch at the faint evil odor that immediately struck my nostrils. Then, turning on the electric light and glancing around, I glimpsed a nameless blasphemy on the yellow and blue rug. . . .

What horror out of nightmare was revealed to the staring eyes of the old man? You will not want to miss this powerful and compelling weird novelette by the author of *The Curse of Yig*. It will be printed complete in the January issue of WEIRD TALES.

MEDUSA'S COIL

By Z. B. Bishop

——Also——

THE FIFTH CANDLE

By CYRIL MAND

The Old Man reached back from his grave each year to light one candle in a weird candelabrum, and strange was the doom that came to the brothers when that candle expired.

BRIDE OF THE LIGHTNING

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Sheila danced on the hilltop while fierce bolts of lightning played about her—but what was that coiling thing of dazzling brilliance that reached for her with its arms of living light?

WAXWORKS

By ROBERT BLOCH

The story of a wax statue that was instinct with evil allure—the fascinating tale of a weird crime, that rises to a climax of horror.

January Issue Weird Tales . . . . . Out December 1

(*Continued from page 760*)
subjects along that line. You could have some author run a series of articles that would bring to us some of the facts on which some of the stories are based. I'll meet you again in the graveyard at midnight with more WEIRD TALES and ghosts."

Above the Common Trash

Bryce M. Walton writes from Twin Falls, Idaho: "Clark Ashton Smith, the old magician of fantasy, is back again with a tale reminiscent of an ancient incarnation. Things like *The Maze of Maal Dweb* cannot appear too much in WEIRD TALES. *The Other Gods,* after I emerged from under its strange, Old World spell, left me quite sad. Beneath the weirdness and horror of Lovecraft's works there has always dwelt an aura of mystical insight into the haunted lands of a dream world. Undoubtedly he is there now on his 'couches of asphodel in wonder and glory bound.' This same atmosphere holds true also in the works of Quinn, sprinkled with deft touches of poetic magic. *Fortune's Fools* was gloriously told, with the same skill that distinguished *Roads,* and *Goetterdaemmerung,* and *The Temple Dancer.* Such stories set WEIRD TALES on its pedestal above the common trash. One cannot find anything remotely resembling them in any periodical, past or present, except perhaps the works of Lord Dunsany. On the other hand such literary abominations as *Green Horror* deserve nothing less than a kick in the pants. A more trite example of utter tripe couldn't be conceived. Once in a while such a sorrowful creation as that appears in the pages of WEIRD TALES, but not often. . . . But wait! Seriously, I would like to go into this quarterly business a bit deeper. I know the precise hour, minute, second that WEIRD TALES arrives on the news stands; and I am there ready to snap it up as a hungry spider leaps upon a fly. I proceed immediately to devour its contents as the aforementioned spider does its proverbial prey; and then, woe, woe, woe, before I so much as get started I have finished it. Alas! there is no more WIERD TALES for a long time—a long, long, long time, an eternity! Now such frenzied action over a mere magazine is not at all natural. The most widely read and popular periodicals are received with at least a slow and easy grace, not clutched at and enfolded, and devoured like —like—like, well, like dope! That's it! Your magazine has the dire yet irrevocable effect of dope. And all we unfortunates who manage to buy, beg, borrow or steal it every month are the most hopeless and avid army of incurable dope addicts that ever lived. WEIRD TALES is as necessary to our existence as food and drink. WEIRD TALES has no competition; it is the only thing of its kind in the world. . . . No matter if the illustrations were discarded, the covers eradicated, the paper transformed into pulp so rough it would chafe one's hands when he turned a page, the edges so rough they could be employed as a saw, and the stories written in Arabic, still would we readers contrive to read WEIRD TALES. But we do not get enough! You are starving us—driving us into gibbering insanity with fruitless desire! You must publish more weird tales! Everyone who buys WEIRD TALES now would also buy the quarterly—they would have to. They could no more help themselves than the dope fiends who emerge from their sleep of dreams into the world of harsh reality, and go howling, raving mad for more. I say bring on a quarterly, filled with reprints, and long stories that are now appearing serially in WEIRD TALES, illustrated, of course, by Finlay, with a spicy sprinkling of verse and short stories."

Jekal's Lesson

Miss Sarah Jacobs writes from New York City: "I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for several years and have derived a great amount of enjoyment from the stories printed in it. I've never yet taken the trouble to write and tell you so, as I just don't go in for that sort of thing. However, I've found the October issue so engrossing, I felt compelled to say a few words of praise. I enjoyed especially *Jekal's Lesson* by David Bernard, whose stories have been unfortunately rather infrequent in your issues. I think he is a writer of real promise. Give us more

of his stories—they're swell. At any rate—here's one reader who will continue to read and appreciate WEIRD TALES."

Imbecility and Delight

H. V. Ross writes from London, England: "The June issue of WEIRD TALES was another feast for the lover of the fantastic and unusual. I would hesitate to say which story will take first place with readers, but I myself would put Robert Bloch's *Slave of the Flames* in that position. I think this is the best thing Bloch has done for many months, and a relief from his tales of ancient Egypt. Virgil Finlay's illustration also rates high marks with me, for he has really captured the look of combined imbecility and delight on the face of the subject, so well described by the author in his story. Yes, a real weird tale and a credit to the pupil and follower of H. P. Lovecraft, whose tale *The Doom That Came to Sarnath* takes second place with me; this is yet another case of the pupil beating the teacher. But HPL's tale was also very good with its smooth polished style, and conception of things utterly alien, the sort of thing we expect from WEIRD TALES. A tale that failed to interest me overmuch was Binder's *From the Beginning,* which seemed too long and somehow out of place in WEIRD TALES. I am not averse to science-fiction in our magazine, but somehow it always seems to strike a wrong note alongside our usual conception of the supernatural. Perhaps I have read too much s. f. in the past, but anyhow it always seems such 'cold' reading now against the warm glamour of authors like Moore, Bloch, Lovecraft, Howard, and especially C. A. Smith, whose incredible fantasies are a never-ending delight. His two poems were very fine, and I think *Farewell to Eros* compares with anything Baudelaire ever did."

A Thunder of Trumpets

Dale H. Exum writes from Nimrod, Texas: "Man! Did Howard and Torbett do something worth while! I'll say they did! *A Thunder of Trumpets* was the best of the whole issue and among the best I ever read, it was so vivid and real, yet weird. Howard's forceful style reminds me very much of Jack London; Bob and Jack were warriors of a like metal. Now for that splendid one, that second-best story of the issue: Bob Bloch's *The Mandarin's Canaries.* Now that Howard is gone, Bloch has only one or two equals, Clifford Ball and perhaps John R. Speer, and Kuttner, maybe. His *Slave of the Flames* is something I'll not forget. He puts an eery atmosphere into his tales that even Lovecraft couldn't beat."

Nitrobenzol

W. A. Betikofer writes from Washington, D. C.: "Though it seems like presumption to criticize Seabury Quinn, I believe that in *The Venomed Breath of Vengeance* he exaggerated the toxic effects of nitrobenzol vapor in the interest of a good story. While studying organic chemistry in college I was required as part of the course to prepare nitrobenzene. I am sure this is the same compound Mr. Quinn refers to as nitrobenzol; the former name was insisted upon for scientific accuracy, but we were told that the ending '-ol' (properly applied only to an alcohol) is often used in commercial names of benzene and its derivatives. I have stewed this stuff and distilled it by the hour, worked in an atmosphere reeking with it, and poured it out in puddles to separate it from crystals of dinitrobenzene. Had it been even half as deadly as what the Hindoo assassin used for beverage purposes, the entire class of 30 or 40 would have been 'pushing up daisies' these last eight or nine years. . . . Henry Kuttner's new characters, Elak and his alcohol-loving confederate Lycon, are the best since Conan. All three seem like real people rather than story-book characters. They endured their hangovers without benefit of Alka-Seltzer, found relaxation in a good healthy brawl, and, I have no doubt, derived immense enjoyment from a good dog or cat fight. Please have Kuttner keep it up."

Lovely Human Element

William Rachum writes from Collinsville, Illinois: "The story *As 'Twas Told to Me* was a masterpiece. 'Twas not so much the weirdness that appealed to me, as the lovely

human element of the narrative. I felt my eyesight grow dim with tears as I read of the trial and hanging of the poor old crone, Goody Upsall (hereafter I will always be kind to poor old ladies). Before I conclude, I must add that *The White Rat* was horror personified. The story described the operation so vividly, I could almost detect the beastly odors mingled with other fumes. More power to you, WEIRD TALES! Thank you, my little magazine, for the wonderful hours you have given me. My life would be incomplete without you."

Alas and Elak

Seymour Kapetansky writes from Detroit, Michigan: "July issue: *Spawn of Dagon*—alas and Elak; Conan by any other name does *not* smell as sweet. Nevertheless, Kuttner's character is real in spite of that Hollywoodish, namby-pamby picture of him. . . . *Fortune's Fools*—how about some more tales of de Grandin's ancestors who set up business along the anti-devil & Co. line? *Dust in the House, The Defense Rests, Escape*—good minor opi. *He That Hath Wings*—surprise! Hamilton can come down to earth, away from far-off galaxies, space-wrecked ships, etc. A nice, sad tale. 'He that lives by the sword. . . .' Your reprint, excellent. *Return to the Sabbath*—gyp off the old Bloch. That ending! . . . All in all, WEIRD is still the best pulp of them all."

The American Indian

Jerre Gray writes from Denver: "During the years that I have been an interested reader of your magazine, it has been a source of constant wonder to me that writers of weird fiction have seemingly almost completely ignored a field of unrivaled richness—the American Indian. In their preoccupation with the more exotic quarters of the earth they have apparently overlooked the source material of their own land—the legends and mysteries of the nomadic tribes, the shadowy enigma of the vanished peoples of the Southwest, and the barbaric glamour of the mighty civilizations that flourished in the sister republics to the south. I can recall only one story dealing entirely with a native legend, *The Ho-Ho-Kam Horror,* an excellent tale handled with an authentic detail of locale. Another WT story, *The Toad Idol,* dealt with an Aztec idol, but in a modern setting."

Fine Reprint

Carroll F. Koons writes from Los Angeles: "One of the finest stories I have ever read in any publication appeared as a reprint in the September issue of 1937. The title was, *When the Graves Were Opened,* a marvelously different tale by Arthur J. Burks. I offered this story to my friends who, having read it, have become regular readers of your magazine. Having just purchased a copy of the latest issue (September), I am looking forward to a pleasant evening with Seabury Quinn's *As 'Twas Told to Me.* Seabury Quinn. Ah, there is a writer of weird tales and fine!"

Dee-lovely

Florence B. Smith writes from Los Angeles: "May I be among the first to give M. Brundage a cheer for at last dressing one of her dee-lightful, dee-lovely ladies? True, the gal isn't gowned very snappily, but she *is* clothed, which ought to satisfy all gripes regarding the nudes. Me, I don't mind—I like 'em all, and as I read the magazine at home, I am never, no never, embarrassed! I did so much enjoy Seabury Quinn's story, *As 'Twas Told to Me;* a change from his Doctor de Grandin stories, and almost as good. Odd, that the reprint should also be about witches, but it was a new one to me, also, and a most interesting one. But for sheer horror, and I mean HORROR, *The White Rat* tops them all! Perhaps it is because I have always had a silly fear of rats and mice, but anyway, it was different, and well written, and has my vote for the September number for the best story. I notice you got some other complaints about reprinting old classics, and you are one magazine that really recognizes, and pays attention to what the public wants, and since then I have been glad to see your own reprints, which a lot of us have never read. Thanks again for a very swell number, and as I

have just renewed my subscription, I am looking forward to a year's enjoyment."

Fancier of Ghoulish Yarns

Henry Hall writes from St. Paul, Minnesota: "Allow me to congratulate you on the excellent job you've done in keeping your magazine what it is, amid the preponderance of trash that floods the market of today. Being as I am, a fancier of ghoulish yarns that make coherent sense, I am, by the same token, a loud and most emphatic rooter for WEIRD TALES, so emphatic, in fact, that I have bought up all the back numbers to be had around this neck of the woods."

WT's Poetry

Eugene Benefiel writes from Hollywood, California: "Nothing but praise have I for the uniformly high quality of WT's poetry —particularly sonnets—and short-shorts. In late issues some of the best of the latter have been *The Tree,* by Lovecraft, and Mackintosh's *Eyes of Ustad Isa.* And for the benefit of those who missed such classics, how about reprints of *The Three Marked Pennies* and *The Red Brain?*"

Concise Comments

S. Youd, Jr., writes from Eastleigh, Hants, England: "Robert E. Howard's *Lines Written in the Realization that I Must Die* was superb! I suppose this is the last Howard poetry we shall get. Unhappy loss!"

Richard Frank writes from Millheim, Pennsylvania: "I should have written you long ago, thanking you for that grand tale by Seabury Quinn, *Roads.* Thanks too for his *Globe of Memories* and his current *As 'Twas Told to Me.* More like them, please."

John V. Baltadonis writes from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: "Finlay's interpretation of Tennyson is magnificent! Brundage contributes a really excellent cover. It's one of her best. I liked Hamilton's *The Fire Princess* best this issue."

Richard Kraft writes from Allenhurst, New Jersey: "The best story in the October WT was *The Black Monk* by Pendarves; a really superlative short. I am glad to see that your short-shorts are as good as they ever are, which means excellent."

NEXT MONTH

WAXWORKS

By ROBERT BLOCH

HERE is a startling and fascinating weird tale about a waxworks museum, in which stood the effigies of the great and the near great, the famous and the infamous. It is a strikingly original story that will hold your intense interest up to the final word, as the author weaves its eery spell.

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in the January issue of

WEIRD TALES

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Like a World Cruise

Richard H. Jamison writes from Valley Park, Missouri: "That was a nice line-up for September—almost like a world cruise. First we are told a tale of Puritan New England, then, reflected in a magic mirror, we see a strange game played at Monte Carlo. After a brief stay in chill Norway—quite welcome in this weather, incidentally—we are transported to India midst a thunder of trumpets. Before leaving we are given a short glimpse of the Taj Mahal at Agra through the eyes of Ustad Isa; thence on to China and the symphony of the Mandarin Quong's canaries. A short detour through the African jungle and we arrive in London where we meet a very bewitching witch in the fog. Quite a trip for a quartah, suh. . . . Just a word of appreciation for *The Black Drama,* one of the best serials WEIRD has yet run. Judge Pursuivant is an interesting fellow. I hope we meet him quite often in the future."

A Brickbat

Janet Aldrich writes from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: "*Black Moon* in your October issue was terrible! Seabury Quinn is one of my favorite authors when he doesn't write about that silly little Frenchman. (Wow! Now watch the fur fly from your other readers.) Some of the Jules de Grandin stories have been all right, but this one took the cake for being putrid. In the first place I have read at least four or five other voodoo stories along the same lines. And in my humble estimation the story was definitely *not* weird. A story of that sort has no place upon the pages of WT. But after Quinn's splendid story, *Roads,* I can forgive him anything. I do believe I'll remember that story until my dying day. My favorite in this issue is *Beyond the Phœnix.* I'm crazy about Elak, and I prefer stories about far-away times and places. The ending of *The Fire Princess* left me a little sad, but content."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what are your favorite stories in this issue? We would also like to know what stories you dislike, as this information will help us keep the magazine as you like it. Write a letter to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City. Your favorite story in the October issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was the concluding installment of Edmond Hamilton's tale of weird adventure in central Asia, *The Fire Princess.*

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of WEIRD TALES, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1938. State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared T. Raymond Foley, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President of WEIRD TALES, publishers of WEIRD TALES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher:* WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Editor:* Farnsworth Wright, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Managing Editor:* None; *Business Manager:* W. S. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; T. Raymond Foley, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

(Signed) T. RAYMOND FOLEY, *President.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of September, 1938.

(SEAL) *(Signed)* Robert A. Pape.

Notary Public, Kings Co., No. 45, Reg. No. 150.
Certificate filed N. Y. Co., No. 92, Reg. No. O-P 53.
(My commission expires March 30, 1940.)

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First—something about the big, substantial company that is making this offer to you. More than 30 years ago, I started in one small room with a mere handful of nearby dealers. Today this business has grown to a great million dollar plant, and a mighty organization of thousands of dealers located throughout the nation. The free book and other printed matter I'll send you will tell you the complete, fascinating story of the amazing growth of this business, which is due to the sound idea behind it.

BIRTH OF A GREAT IDEA

That idea was simply—to supply housewives direct, through authorized local dealers, with daily home necessities such as Coffee, Teas, Spices, Extracts and other grocery products, Kitchen and Laundry Supplies, Home Medicines and Toilet Articles—over 250 products that housewives must buy; and to supply these products factory fresh and in the best quality obtainable. By eliminating costly distribution through many middlemen, these local dealers are able to offer highest quality at attractive prices and still make a fine profit on every order they take. To help dealers enjoy big business and big earnings throughout the year, I furnish them constantly with attractive bargain offers of all kinds for their customers—premiums, one cent sales, free product deals, etc., that simply shut out competition!

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With such a splendid, money-making proposition, it is no wonder that Norman Geisler, of Michigan, was able to report clear profits of $129.00 in one week; that Mrs. H. H. Hosick, of Nebraska, reported $41.73 her very first week; that W. J. Way, of Kansas, with us 9 years, reported $19.10 in one day! For many of my dealers this wonderful opportunity has proved a Godsend! Adolph Pickney, of New York, who had never taken an order in his life, reported $60.00 in a week, just working evenings! When Hans Coordes, of Nebraska, started with me, he was penniless; 6½ months later he wrote me: "Today I am worth a little more than $1,200!" These exceptionally fine earnings show your possibilities!

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I'LL FINANCE YOU

Through my liberal credit plan, once you start, you can do business on my capital. Under this plan, I'll ship your orders on credit, give you ample time to make deliveries to your customers, pocket your own profits and only then pay me my share of the money!

PART-TIME PROFITS

I number among my dealers many housewives, teachers, ministers, farmers and others who devote only their part time. Many dealers started on part time and then found the business so profitable that they gave up their regular occupations to devote full time to this splendid business in which they are their own boss!

TRY MY PLAN FOR 30 DAYS WITHOUT RISKING A CENT

Under my plan, without your risking a penny, you can live the life of a local authorized dealer, pick up orders from housewives in your neighborhood and pocket the large cash profits. You will have 30 days to prove to yourself how thrilling it is to make big money, be your own boss, free and independent. If you are not entirely satisfied with the business and its money-making possibilities, I guarantee that you won't be out a penny!

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The big Display Outfit that I send you is so complete, so attractive, and such a big help, that you will be amazed to see how simple it is to make money in this fascinating business of your own. This Outfit contains a large assortment of full-size packages of the most popular products in the line—also my simple, "sure-fire" Dealer Plan which you can so easily follow that you need no previous experience or special training. You will also receive free samples and advertising matter to give away; and a big, beautifully illustrated Display Catalog which pictures and describes in a most tempting way every one of the more than 250 quality products in the line. Merely showing housewives this catalog has brought many big orders and fine cash profits!

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